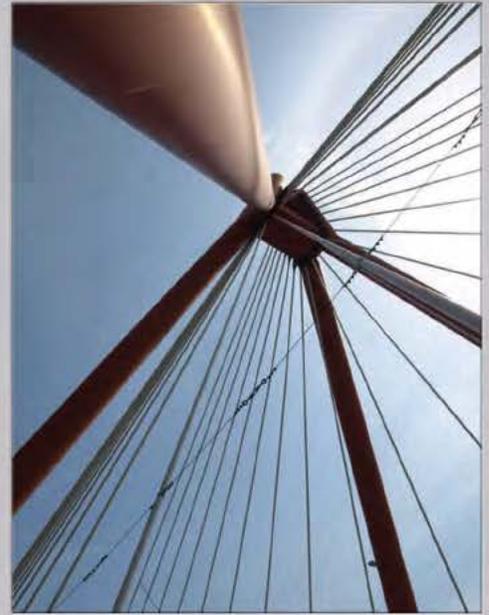




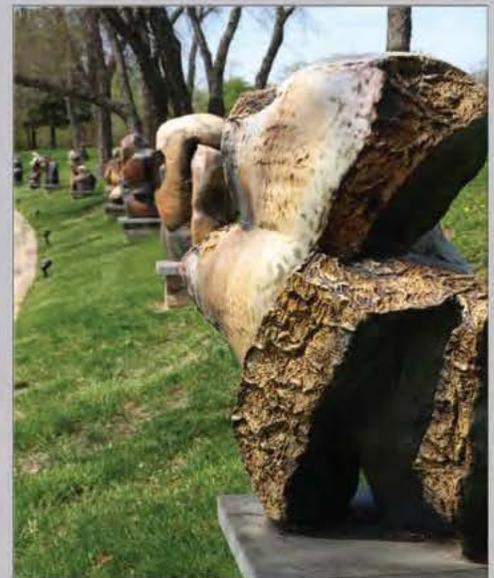
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From the Faculty Sponsor:

Welcome to the fifteenth edition of IUPUC's literary magazine! All Content, except the faculty/staff highlight section, is original student work. Each stage of this magazine's production process has been run by students: call for submission, judging and selection of works, layout and design, copyediting, and print production. IUPUC students submit works under a blind review process, and student editors' base acceptances on quality. We owe many thanks to Vicki Kruse, the Division of Liberal Arts Senior Administrative Secretary, for managing submissions and biographical notes in order to retain anonymity during the selection process. Please note that *Talking Leaves'* purpose is to empower voices and to encourage self-expression; as such, works receive only minimal copyediting to preserve the uniqueness of each contributor's voice.

IUPUC's magazine of the arts was originally titled *Literalines*. Students changed the name to *Talking Leaves* in 2005. The story goes that American settlers carried maps, letters, and other documents that caught the attention of Native Americans. The papers rustled like leaves, and the Native Americans realized the power of written documents that "talk." When you read *Talking Leaves*, you celebrate the power of words and images with us by listening to the contributors "talk" while you leaf through our pages. You can find a digital archive of the magazine's editions on the IUPUC website. Post links to them on your Face Book, Twitter, or other social networking accounts to keep the leaves talking across our contemporary internet connections.

Talking Leaves owes special thanks to the Student Council who generously allocates student monies to publish this magazine.

Lisa Siefker-Bailey, PhD

Talking Leaves 2011



Photography by S. G. Traylor 2011

Sherry Traylor
Editor at Large

& Cole Billman
Assistant Editor

Faculty

Sponsor:

Lisa Siefker-Bailey,
Ph.D.

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Policy and Purpose:

Talking Leaves accepts
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non-fiction, poetry, art,
and photography from
students at Indiana
University-Purdue
University of Columbus.

Each anonymous
submission is reviewed by
Copy Editors and judged
solely on artistic merit.

Cover Art:

Thanks to Sue Breeding,
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formatting the cover for
this magazine.

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Tamra Roe and Sherry G. Traylor

FOREWORD by Sherry Traylor, Editor at Large

Art, poetry, and prose often mirror the culture from which it grows. In times of prosperity we share joy, while tragedy spawns a deeper gravity of expressions. This edition of *Talking Leaves* is dedicated to showing the diversity of our student population. Tragedy, humor, beauty, and life's daily challenges are captured by the creative voices of our artists in this collection.

The diversity of entries includes a new genre for the magazine, creative non-fiction, a genre we've never before included. In addition to student submissions, poetry from faculty and staff at IUPUC appears in a special "highlights" section. IUPUC staff and instructors inspire students with their academic skills every day; however, this feature allows staff to be recognized for their personal literary talents. *Talking Leaves* is supported by the IUPUC Division of Liberal Arts, the English faculty, the English Club, and our talented student body.

It takes not only creativity but courage from students to allow peers to critique work for publication. Student submissions accepted for this year's publication offer a unique perspective or subject matter. Many pieces represent students' first published work. Early in the semester the staff interested in assisting with *Talking Leaves* dwindled due to illness and graduation from IUPUC. In the end, only the two editors aforementioned were left to make the final decisions regarding submissions. We accept these submissions for the magazine with great appreciation to all artists, and regret that all submissions cannot be included.

Poetry



Photography by S. G. Traylor

Aunt Ruth Gets Knocked Up

Her mother never told her
because you didn't talk about things like that.
So how could she know
why he liked her company?
That when he touched the daisy

calico of her dress
it wasn't because she had something on her back,
or that the door waiting
at the end of the hall
was dangerous ground?

Until she was there,
the springs creaking under her,
watching dust blinking in and out
of the yellow air like shooting stars,
sunlight penetrating her outstretched hand,
a stained glass window of blood,
an eyelash tickling her cheek
until heavy fingers
brush it away.

She is only a girl,
but as a woman she will wear
black dresses,
scarlet lipstick,
a vicious letter pinned to her dress.
Her sister – the responsible one –
will mother the child
while she lives
in cobwebs, in exile,
with the curtains drawn.
She talks to the pictures
of her mother's dead sisters
and brothers and parents. She knits
blankets and afghans
to keep her bed warm
in the night when she lies awake,
watching shadows quiver on the ceiling.
In a vase on her bedside table
the daisies are wilting.

SARAH AKEMON



Photography by Tamra Roe

After rain

leeches swarmed across the pavement
from one flooded field
to another and you held me
over the water laughing
and I was afraid but you told me
you would never let me go.

In my dream I had to pick
the leeches from my skin
like old Band-Aids. I woke up
and you were asleep in my bed.
You stroked my head and called me
 "love" "pet"
 and then

I woke alone like I always am. Tonight
I am an icebox of sighs.
 I, Panic. I, Eyelash.
I am your Bible of dreams. You
are the sound of my heartbeat and these
are some promises I promise to keep.

I will remember
 when you kissed me in the cemetery where my least favorite poet is
buried.

I will remember
 when I wouldn't believe it was real and the day I buried my soul
inside you and took yours with me and we sat on the street corners of
Forever saying "always".

I will remember
 you, with your sleepy cheek pressed to your guitar, playing the song
so beautiful it made me cry before you ever said it was mine.

I will go back in time
 to the time you said "We're fine as just us, but what about later?"
and say
 "Nobody else matters."

SARAH AKEMON

You said we were too different,
because walking soul-in-soul
wasn't good enough, but forever
we called ourselves "I" meaning both of us
so I say "Remember
the time we had the same dream
because we were talking to each other
in our sleep?"

You say you will always
love me so it's up to me
to say "I love you, too,"
because every poem about you

is always a happy one.

is really a poem about the goldfish we found alive in the creek

is really
a poem about sunlight and the shadows
of trees and these
are the ways I am learning to leave.

SARAH AKEMON

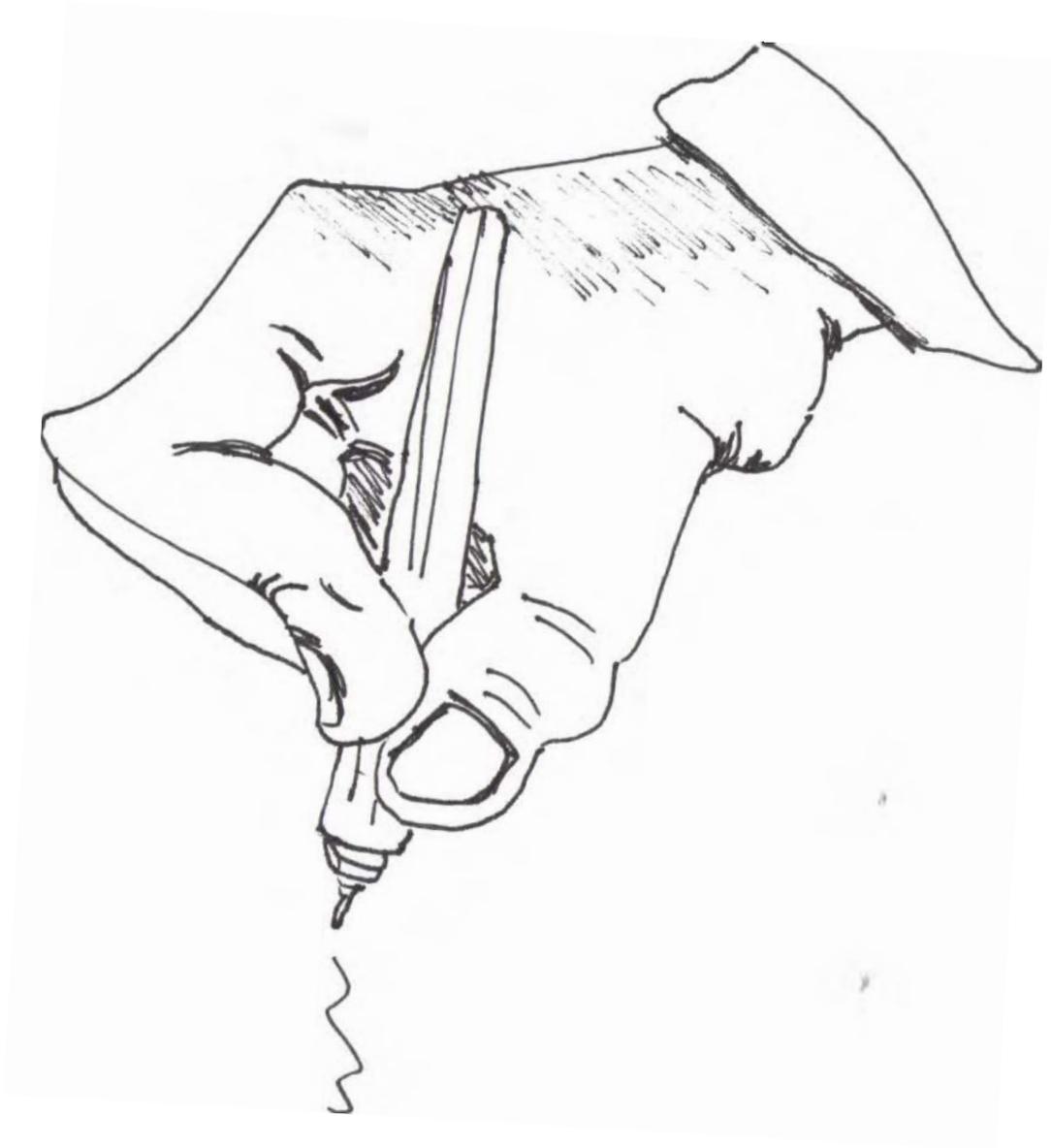
Discus

These are my children,
my bright red bastards
bawling in the cupboards,
the bathtub,
the pipes beneath the sink.
I have baked them into puddings,
sold them to strangers for pennies.
Buy one, get one free. They're useless
to me, anyway.

These are my daughters, my Ulalumes,
Ulalumes. Entombed in the dank
corners of the root cellar.
They whimper and cry and call my name
and dig their way out with silvery spoons.

I have put them into closets, bread boxes,
Bluebeard rooms.
But men slide under the doors,
between the bars of their cages
where I've shut them up,
goddam larks and nightingales,
little harlots I'll package in cardboard and float
over the ocean
with their half-gold
twice-bastards
while I lie in my bed with my eyes wide open
dreading the day
those boxes come back to me.

SARAH AKEMON



“Hand” by S.G. Traylor

Artificial Emotions

Beauty

That's a mottled yellow
See the spots of black
Almost like dirty sand
Ironic, beauty being so ugly

Dreamy

That's a pale blue
Almost like a clear sky
Just after midday
*Stormy skies create adventures
outshining any dream*

Control

One of the darkest greens
You can only see under trees
In the midnight forests
*Yet the forests grows wild
And is more beautiful because of it*

Love

Pure shiny red
Not pure opaque or simply see through
More plastic reflecting light
In other words, a bit of fake

Sanity

A pure white
No imperfections
Or mars, just uniform
Just boring, life needs madness

AMY BALLENGER

*What will these do for you
Make me happy, feel alive
Truly overwhelming life
At least until it kills you
True but in the moments
Before I start to die
I will be flying high
Out of this black and grey world
Far over the rainbow*

*Where the colors shine
With life overwhelming
You'll blaze with color
And then fade to forever black
All thanks to those little pills
Clenched so tightly in your hand*

AMY BALLENGER



Photography by S.G. Traylor 2010

Inside

"How queer that we're apart now,
at this final place
of white walls and deal desks
behind which you sit
and say to me, 'You can't see her, you're not family,'
family? I will show you family

I will show you two in love
In ways which you can never understand
In your petty leather chair
I will show you us.
In an embrace on a sofa
In the final moments of a movie
I will show you happy sighs
I will show you lullabies

What will you show me?
You will show me paperwork
You will show me laws
You will show me meaningless things
You won't show me love
I will show you knitted scarves
In secretly wrapped boxes
I will show you bedtime books read aloud
In our sweet voices.
I will show you happiness
In sharing a springtime sky
I will show you flowers on countertops
In glass vases and well-loved pots
I would show you all these things
If you'd only let me
Inside.

What will you show me? It seems clear..

You will show me the door.

But which door will it be?" a girl screamed at a nurse, her words lost in pain.

COLE BILLMAN

Cipher

go about your business--
 there's nothing to see here--
just a girl in a corner
 looking for words--
words to teach of a new way
 to see-- and define things for
what they truly may be--

 she's so close to
meaning
 but so far away--
maybe she'll find it
 some sane day
when she takes the time
 to find the right rhyme
and the rest of the song
falls into place

 but the rhyme doesn't
matter-- it only gets in the way
 of the rest of the message
she's grasping to say-- to you--
 you who she already told
to just go away--
 watch some television
or some other thing--
 get on Facebook--
look up some porn--
 whatever you do
when you find yourself bored--
 that's what life's about
for you-- nothing greater--
 nothing more

what have you done
 to learn how to know
what's happening-- here and now--
 what do you know about
the girl in the corner--
 who's writing these lies
about you down-- nothing--
 nothing, nothing she'd say--
there's nothing to see here--
 just go away

COLE BILLMAN

A man is much more

A man is much more
than the sum of his actions
he is more than what
he has done
he is more than the things
he has lost in his life
and he's more than the things
that he's won
what he has seen
and all that he knows
more important
than where he has been
No single good deed
can define a man
any more than any
one sin
I've walked the line between
righteous and wicked
I've teetered between
bad and good
I've given too much
to be called a taker
and taken far more
than I should

But I am a man
with the wisdom to know
that actions are defined
by intent
and that sometimes the truth
is not in outcome
but lies
inside what was meant

ALEX CONRAD

A Former American

Realism
Point of View
Consciousness
Perception

His insistence that writers be allowed the greatest possible Freedom
In presenting their view of the world

He came to Venice and
Looked out the window and
Smoked his cigar and
Thought.

The Daily Grind

(March 1, 2000, Maine)

An aggravated chief said, "That's the last straw."
He climbed the conveyor and looked in the chute,
The "Hog," a wood chipper, had clogged up its maw.
He then snatched a rake to untangle the brute.

He jimmied, and rattled, and blasted away,
The beastly equipment remained defiant.
"Just one more heave, and we'll continue the day."
The hungry machine was more than compliant.

The boss jolted hard with the yard working tool,
The "Hog" was well fed and digested his kill.
The workers around saw the horror unspool
As a fine red mist gave the device its fill.

Let this to be a lesson to man and machine,
Human is peasant, the contraption is king.

OSHU HUDDLESTON

Mug

“Here, take my wallet,
seventeen dollars and
two maxed out
credit cards and
a picture of the girl
who doesn’t love me
anymore. And
my sandwich shop card and
my student I.D. and
the lint from my holey pocket.
Take it all.
Just please, PLEASE
Don’t hurt me.
Don’t shove me down
and pound your fists to my face
don’t stomp my guts
until they liquefy.
Don’t ruin my life
by making me pay
with my false pride.
Don’t put me in my place
because I
definitely deserve it.
Don’t knock me down
a few notches because
I’m a prick.
Please,” you say to me.

OSHU HUDDLESTON

Lost Boys

There's a picture of you and your brother Paul
hanging crooked and yellowed over the piano
The decayed edges of a summer forgotten, two brothers
forever set in a happy instant. Their grins stretch wide,
as if measuring the distance between sunrise and starlight
You're holding his shoulder tightly, his prickly
red hair spiking skyward, giant sunglasses askew
Freckles explode on Paul's face as he holds up a
big glittering trout on a fishing line and a can of Big Red
in the other. Your blue eyes frolic and smirk, saluting the
camera from underneath a big blue trucker hat. I wonder
about those boys by the lake, tanned gangly bean pole limbs
and giddy jumping feet, all warmed from sun and humid air
Where did those silly boys go? Where did they go?

Crash

rogue wave of a man
hefty brazen bravado
I snicker and reach
up to catch cupfuls of you
as you crash into breakdown

Warm-blooded

we rush like mad rain
electric droplets sizzle
lips taste hot marvels
imbedded in taut shy skin
tongues swarm with heady beauty

BETH MCQUEEN

Men

When you speak, I imagine my head submerged in water
An ocean fills my inner ear, allowing only the faint deformed remains of
your words to enter, which works best for me.
And when you never notice, it doesn't make you less of a boy; you still
miss most of the hints.

When you rest your hand on my shoulder I wonder why it won't freeze
off.
The weight only adds to the worries it has to carry. I'm a miserable sod.

When you ask me to look into your eyes, I only stare at the hairs that
grow between your brows, all unhinged in direction.
I watch them battle as you rumple your forehead; your wrinkles get
deeper the longer I keep this up. It's revolutionary and it has always
been my fault.

And when you make what you call love to me I just lie there, connecting
stars on your bedroom ceiling. When I've almost completed Virgo, I am
moved, it is over.
I feel nothing. The fascination I have with the night sky puts off the
vexation I have for this moment, for you.

And when you tell me you love me I tell you I love you back. Today is no
day for plain speaking.

CARLEIGH OWENS

Pg. 128 Ch. 56 Factotum

I found a job through the news paper

It was called car wash technician
I had to look the part so I went to goodwill
Got a greasy t-shirt and a ladies sweater
I combed my hair
Went to the interview
Any criminal convictions?
Only one,
 Four years ago,
 Did two for cock fighting
 Dusty ring, two huge chickens
 Stabbing blood
 The undercover cop bet on mine, rusty,
 And lost
 I took the heat
Washed cars before?
No,
 Seen it done though,
 Scrub and dry seems simple
Should work out, its minimum wage
I started on a Tuesday
Got one paycheck
Drunk for half a week and
Back to unemployment,
Back to the dog fight,
Eating beefaroni, cold,
With flatware from fast food restaurants,
Taking my toilet in cold fairground bathrooms,
Where water fountains are frozen,
Utilizing job filled newspapers as blankets.
Haven't drank beer in months,
 Only stolen rot gut wines,
 And stagnant water from the public library drinking fountain,
Hoping for warmer weather, maybe a man with low enough self-esteem
to look at me

CARLEIGH OWENS

Autumn

An outcast amongst normality,
Waiting for others to join,
There it stands, shedding its coat,
Hues of oranges, reds, yellows, and browns,
Paint the forest's floor,
With every step I take,
Crisp music notes echo softly through the breeze,
A reddish orange canvas falls off its canvas holder,
I snatch it within my palms,
The broken crumbled canvas FALLS to the painted floor,
The wind snatches it up within its hands,
The autumn tree paints her portrait.....

May Your Voice

May your voice be louder than any other,
May your voice be like the crashing thunder,
May your voice light up my life,
Like the moon in the darkness,
May your voice speak softly to my soul,
Like a bird's sweet song,
On this path,
May your voice,
Guide me along...

She Talks to Chickens

She talks to chickens,
Here chick- chick- chick—
Slipping on wet stones in husband's rubber boots.
Her yellow plastic coat hangs like an Easter basket turned upside down.
Her bare legs dappled with cold purple,
Strolling in a chicken yard that smells of wet dog, dirt, and rotten eggs.

She spies the bird with three wings.
It incessantly scratches at weed roots.
Carefully unique in its organized manure pile,
Living stupid.

Her voice sincere and calm,
Here chick- chick- chick—
Hunger is waiting impatiently.
Feed thrown from the left,
Her right hand holds the axe.

Here chick- chick- chick—
With accustomed aim her hand trades feed for a bobbing neck.
Following one quick movement—*swish—thump!*
Metal to stump ends conversation.
Three wings jerk quiet against the yellow plastic coat.
She strolls back to the house—
Her rubber boots squeaking on wet rocks.

SHERRY TRAYLOR



Photography by S. G. Traylor 2011

TWO MILE WALK THROUGH COLUMBUS, INDIANA

Looking through red reversed letters from the window of Jill's diner,
Waiting on a burger and looking at Kennon's pipes and mirrors.
Walking two miles from the park to this bench-
Passing the other side of every postcard picture,
The views of Columbus others don't see.
An eerily quiet walk from Millrace, beneath the bridge of Third Street-
Where a plaque honors the survivors of "death valley,"
And describes the uncivilized early 1900's version of Columbus.

Towering over downtown like spider legs, a bridge towers the river walk.
Crossing by barricades of developing architectural creations,
Comparing empire styles of 1874 on the right, and 2011 youth on the left.
Strolling North across engraved bricks, a path intercepted by-
Painted passages enhanced by lofted geometric art, where
Simple benches offer respite in an otherwise empty alley.

Walking one experience among generations who-
On their way someplace else, left their mark.
Four hundred square miles marked by the name of Lt. Col. Bartholomew,
Populated by generations of natives and transients alike.
Changing the surrounding fields and dirt roads into a foundation,
A city with a unique story, built upon man's imagination.

SHERRY TRAYLOR



Photography by S.G. Traylor 2011



Photography by S. G. Traylor 2010

Feelings Of The Heart

I have wanted so long to let go.
Of these feelings in my heart.
They have been bottled up for so long.
I just didn't know how to let go.
Pain, fear, anger, love, joy, happiness.
All mixed together in one big pot named the heart.
A father's words, a grandmother's care.
Left with anger and despair.
Why did you have to go so soon?
Now you are not here to heal all my wounds.
Cancer spreads like wildfire.
No one left to admire.
Mother is sick and doesn't know why.
Try my best to get by.
Work hard at school to keep my grades up.
But no matter what I always seem to fail.
So I look to God to be my guardrail.
And I know with Him I will never fail.
Stuck in the hospital not feeling well.
All the pain feels like I am stuck in Hell.
I wish sometimes that it would all go away.
Just feel like running away.
But then you speak to me and tell me not to go.
Then I feel alone no more.
Wandering around lost and not knowing where to go.
I look to you for guidance.
You take my hand and lead me down the right path.
Your eyes see through me so crystal clear.
But still you take me pain, fear, and sins.
You take them away without a second thought.
I want to thank you for all you do.
I know I could not give back any of the wonderful things you have done
for me.
The price you paid two thousand years ago.
You gave more love than any man could ever hope to give.
As I live my life I will live it for you.
I am going to do things right.
So I can be with you when I am gone from this world.

NATHAN SMITH

Fiction and Non-Fiction



Photography by Tamra Roe

COURTESY FLUSH BY OSHU HUDDLESTON

I don't know what is wrong with my system, but it has been like this for years now. Dr. Schiavani said that doctors generally have no idea what causes it, but he believes I have ulcerative colitis. He thinks maybe that my generous employment of daily supplements have a lot to do with it. He prescribed a medicine that more or less continued the symptoms of ulcerative colitis, so it was impossible to tell if my condition was improving.

"Courtesy flush," said the guy in the next stall. "Please. God have mercy."

Dr. Schiavani decided that one way to see if I was getting any better was to treat one of the symptoms of ulcerative colitis that was not a side effect from taking the mesalamine I was taking. We settled on my anemia, which either could have been a symptom of the sickness or a sickness all unto its own. He determined that my anemia was caused by a vitamin B12 deficiency, so he administered a series of B12 injections.

"You're killing me," said the guy in the next stall.

A test returned that alarmed Dr. Schiavani. The injections had resulted and/or exposed my peripheral artery disease, which more or less left my legs in a lot of pain any time I would walk. I spent time in a wheelchair after an angioplasty on my femoral arteries. Because of the surgery it became dangerous to take any type of B12, so my anemia returned. The good news was that soon, after some therapy, I would be able to walk without pain again; I just had to wait to treat my anemia again so that I would have the energy to walk.

"For the love of *God*, man," said the guy in the next stall. "Take a break or something."

We were also back to treating the ulcerative colitis, except now I was temporarily crippled. Dr. Schiavani was sure that my migrating arthritis in my large joints was not a side-effect of the mesalamine and that we needed to find out if it was independent of the ulcerative colitis. To treat the arthritis, the good doctor suggested a supplement that contained natural ingredients. I told him that I probably had some in my collection somewhere. He then recalled that perhaps my obsession with supplements is what he theorizes caused my ulcerative colitis in the first place. I instead took a try with a manufactured drug.

"..as I walk through the valley of the shadow of death," said the guy in the next stall.

The stiffening of my joints lessened, but the medication furthered my chronic diarrhea and brought on some serious kidney impairment. Dr. Schiavani declared it end-stage renal disease, which went undetected while we were treating all of those other ailments. The treatments for those other ailments also *worsened* the ESRD, and it progressed all the more faster since nothing was done to treat my anemia in the meantime.

I at that time needed to stay on dialysis until I could get a kidney transplant. During the wait, I was prescribed a hormone that would stimulate red-cell growth and not affect me negatively during kidney down-time.

“If there is a God,” said the guy in the next stall, “he isn’t in right now.”

Ah, yes, the pulmonary embolism was a result of the erythropoietin hormone I was taking for my anemic condition during the end-stage renal disease. The anemia was all but taken care of, again, but there was a new problem in a blood clot obstructing passage to one of my lungs. This was, of course, taken care of by Dr. Schiavani’s most trusted surgeon buddy/old college roommate, Dr. Franzenberg. Things were certainly looking up for me at that point, as the surgery was a success. And now for that kidney...

“Jesus H. *Christ*, man,” said the guy in the next stall. “This must be what a fire in the morgue would smell like.”

Dr. Franzenberg told me to not thank him just yet. I awoke from another surgery to the great news that my kidney transplant surgery was a success, but for unknown reasons, my body was having a hard time accepting the organ. He placed me on a triple therapy regimen of steroids, inhibitors, and agents that would eventually fail to save my life.

“This is hell,” cried the guy in the next stall. “Oh, *gawd*, this is hell!”

The guy in the next stall was right. And to think of what I went through when I was alive.

MAKING POINT BY COLE BILLMAN

Today is April 12th – it is my birthday, I am now seventy-eight years old. Most people would say it's ironic that this is the day I died. I just think it's plain old bad luck. When I became seventy-seven I thought, This is it, let it roll! My lucky year, double 7's, the luckiest number a man can live to be. It looks like my luck ran out. So, here I am now, alone in my easy chair, celebrating my birthday, scotch in my left hand and an unsent letter to my daughter clenched in my right.

I can't feel a thing anymore. All that's left is numbness; physical pain is gone, a thing of a past life. My body is no longer my body, yet here I remain: with a new sense of self. My eyes and ears, once my connections to the world, have failed, but I see and hear without them, more clearly than ever before. Though, it is strange, this new consciousness. It's as if everything were distant now; like I'm looking through the wrong end of a pair of binoculars and holding a pair of conch shells up to my ears. I am here, yet I am gone and I will never return. Memories flash by as clearly as if they were happening before my lifeless eyes.

I'm at the beach, it's summer. I can't be more than eight years old. I'm on vacation with my family. I know my father and brothers are here somewhere, but I only see my mother. The tide is coming in and we're leaving soon, but I want a few more minutes here, just a moment longer to play in the wet sand while the water rolls up against my feet. Mom is yelling at me, but I can't make out what she's saying. All I hear is the rolling of the waves as they come and go. The water is crashing against my stomach suddenly. Something is brushing up against my leg. I plunge my tiny hand into the water. It's warm on the surface yet very cold further in. My fingers latch on to the thing at my leg. It's a large conch shell. I know you can hear the ocean in these things. At least I will take this piece of the ocean home with me. I emerge from the water with my trophy, soaking and shivering. Mom is there for me; she puts a towel around my shoulders and lifts me up, holding me tightly, rubbing my back in just the right way. I feel warm immediately.

My mother is gone now. She died many years ago. As I looked down on her and she lay in her casket, our preacher told me she was in a better place – that I would see her again when I joined her in Heaven. I wonder now if she had heard our conversation, as I hear now, just as I had heard her own yells that day at the beach; muffled by the sound of the ocean. I don't want to see her lying there again, lifeless, motionless, stiff; looking nothing at all like the vibrant woman who raised me so well. I try to fight back the memories, but they come. They are important and I'll never forget them, as much as I want to.

I am nineteen. As I shake the hand of the preacher I've grown up listening to, he pulls me into an embrace. It's a nice gesture, but it doesn't make me feel any better at all. Nor does the lie he tells me, "She's in a better place now, son. One day when you make your journey through the gates of Heaven, she will be there waiting with open arms." I don't believe him even then. I take one last look at my mother before her casket is closed. This is not how I want to remember her, but this image will be burned into my memory for the rest of my life. I won't be able to remember her in any other way. The casket is closed. My father, brothers, cousins, and I lift the heavy wooden box and carry it away.

I am being carried away. That is, my body is being carried away. I must have lost the time in my memories. How long has it been? Probably the damned neighbors came by and found me there. Bastards, what did you want? All I ever wanted was to be left the hell alone. Maybe I'm not being carried, but I'm definitely moving. The ceiling is white, but it flows by like a river glazed with melting snow. What is this place? Where am I going? Where are you fuckers taking me?

We stop in a white room. A white man with white hair in a white coat wearing a white mask looms over me with ominous intent. Shaking his head, he places something into a glass. I hear two distinct plops. He closes what were once my eyelids. I can still see, but I do not want to. It is strange, this sensation, this sight that I now possess. This must be how a spider feels; with its many eyes looking in every direction, only it's as if I have many more. I can see in every direction at once if I will it so, but everything seems so very far away. I shift my view and find myself looking myself in the eye; at two lifeless orbs lazily floating around in a glass of clear liquid.

Another memory -- I am looking into my own eyes. This time they are in their sockets, where they have always belonged. I must be looking into a mirror. I'm not sure what's happening. I'm confused, disoriented; my eyes are red; my face is pale. I think I'm going to be sick. My fingers clench onto the dirty white sink beneath the mirror. Suddenly, I am in the nearest bathroom stall, upchucking into the porcelain toilet. I hug it like it's my best friend, which it is. Feeling better, I gather myself up and stumble back out to the casino floor. At the Craps table, I lay the last fifty dollars I have on the pass line and light up a cigar. The new shooter looks hot. He is wearing a tweed jacket and tie, real fancy-like. He chooses his dice like a pro, rolling them around in his fingertips before tossing them out on the table. *Snake Eyes.*

I wake up in jail, feeling like I tried to head-butt oncoming traffic. I go back to sleep. After what feels like hours, I wake up and claim my one phone call. I call my wife and tell her I've lost everything. I don't know it yet, but I'm about to lose her too. She says that she is taking our daughter to her father's, and that I would never see either of them again. She doesn't say, "our daughter," she says, "my daughter." I have never felt so alone, and never will until years from now.

My body is lying on a table and several tubes are sticking out of it. A yellow fluid is flowing through the tubes and what once were my veins. I am alone, but the white man has been coming to check on me from time to time. I feel sorry for him. His job is one of the worst that I could imagine. Does he have friends? Can he? What can he possibly tell the women he meets? He must lie about what he does for work. No one wants to think about being dead. This man makes me think about being dead. I am dead, but what does that mean? There is a tunnel, they got that much right. No light at the end of it, though. Liars. Idiots. Fucks. I believed it; I bought into it just like all the rest. Aren't I supposed to be burning in hell right about now? Come and get me, you fuckers.

I am in an argument with a man. My daughter is here; she is older, and so very beautiful. I have been seeing her a lot lately. It has been wonderful. When her mother passed away, she looked me up. I don't think I was anything like what she had imagined,

but that's probably a good thing. Hell knows what lies her mother told her about me. There's nothing that I can do to make up for the lost years, but I've damn well been trying. "Daddy, stop!!" my daughter cries, but I don't listen. This man is all wrong for her. I've known that all along. He reminds me too much of myself. All the other bastards here would never say it to my daughter's face, but they feel the same way I do about this man; they whisper behind her back. I hear the whispered gossip; I see the troubled looks in their eyes. I'm not a coward like them. I say what needs to be said; I do what needs to be done. I should have been dancing with my daughter, but I'm dancing with this man. Putting all of my weight into my momentum, I slam my fist into his face. He drops to the floor. His blood stains my daughter's wedding dress. I never see her again..

..Until now. She is here. She came! My daughter is at my funeral. My Carolina. She is standing over me with her eyes closed. A better man than the one I punched is at her side. I've never met this man, but I like him. He has kind eyes; he respects her. I can tell. My daughter opens her eyes and a tear falls down her cheek. Her tear falls onto what once was my arm. I want so much to reach out and hug her, but I can't; I'm trapped here; locked in this shell. This is hell. The preacher at the side of my casket shakes the man with my daughter's hand. He is trying to move them along so that he can get this unpleasant business done. Bastard. My daughter's man puts an arm around her waist. She asks him to leave her alone with me for just a moment. Leaning in, she whispers to me, "I know you can't hear me, but thank you for the letter, daddy. It meant everything to me. I never stopped thinking about you either. You were right about Tommy. I never should have agreed to marry him. If you hadn't been there to rescue me, I don't know where I would be."

She got my letter! Great God, she actually got it. She's actually here! She smiles as she looks down at me. I have never seen anything so beautiful. The preacher sees an opportunity and puts an arm around her shoulder. He doesn't know anything about anything. He tells her the same lie they all told me about my mother, my father, and all but one of my brothers. I will haunt this son of a bitch, I swear it. I want out so desperately, but there is no escape. My daughter goes to her seat and the preacher begins my eulogy. More lies. All of it lies. Lies. Lies. Lies.

They close my casket and parade me off to the cemetery. Not one of them truly knows me, save my daughter. What are they even doing here? They don't have the right. I'm in darkness now, but I know those fuckers are out there, crowded around me, pretending they care. None of them care. Only my daughter cares; only she matters; only through her can I find any peace. But, I am robbed of it. I know what she saw in my casket; I know how she will remember me; I know she will never be able to forget.

The casket is being lowered into the earth. I can hear those bastards above, shoveling dirt over me. They can't even do it by hand, with fucking shovels; these fuckers are using a tractor to move the dirt. The weight of the dirt all around my wooden box is crushing in from all sides. My casket is folding in on itself. Soon enough I can no longer hear the dirt, only the creaking of the wood as the casket splinters and caves in. Nothing is left after that; nothing to see; nothing to hear. Nothing.

But then, in the distance, I hear it. That sound of the ocean I remembered so well. The smell of it, the taste, the touch, the sight, the sound; it all comes back to me. My mother is there, calling for me. I go to her. She wraps a towel around my shoulders and picks me up into a full, warm, loving embrace. I have never felt so alive.



Photography by Tamra Roe

RETROPOLIS 2

Hating Tech-life in 2011

*Suffering from techno-stress?
Got millions of beady digital
eyeballs looking over your shoulder?
Come live with us at RETROPOLIS.
RETROPOLIS 2, the new Memory
Community offering from Heavenly
Existence Inc., transports
you to 1950s America, a time of
grassroots family values. A time
when machines worked for humans.*

Mary dreams that her car is careening down a highway—not out of control, just out of her control. She is cocooned in her comforter, unable to move arms, or legs, steer or brake. She has no idea where she is going, what or who is taking her there...

A mechanical voice says, “It’s 6:00 A.M. Rise and shine.”

Mary doesn’t.

“RISE AND SHINE!” demands the alarm clock.

Her arms and legs fully functional, Mary uses them to body-slam the clock and stomp on it.

Like Spawn of *Chucky*, the demonic Keeper of Time repeats “Rise and shine! Rise and shine! RISE AND SHINE!” She smothers it with her pillow and does a body-flop into the bed.

Mary’s cell phone rings. She checks the display. It’s Futz.

“Hello, Mr. Futz.” She realizes that her voice whines like a schoolgirl greeting her teacher. She snaps her words to attention. “What’s up, sir?”

“Mary, is the Bobrite proposal done? Presentation time is 10:00 A.M. I need to review it. Is it done? Why aren’t you online? Good God, Bobrite is Technogadget’s highest profile customer. You act like he’s some slob off the street.”

“I’m working from home until 9:00 this morning, sir.”

“The security log shows that you haven’t been online since 2:00 A.M., Mary.”

Warning bells go off and pink slips dance in Mary’s head. He’s watching me, she thinks.

“Are you having trouble with your computer again? I’ve offered to buy you *Computers for Dummies*. You need to amp up your computer skills.”

“The presentation is done, sir.”

“Get online and send me that proposal ASAP.” Click.

“Yes sir, you bastard.”

The laptop is waiting for her in the kitchen—waiting for the moment it can drive her to the brink of insanity.

Mary tosses the cell phone on the kitchen table. It lands on the laptop's keyboard. Her computer screen lights up.

What the hell? Oh no, she forgot to shut down before stumbling to bed. She forgot to close the Bobrite files.

A white warning message flashes in the lower right hand corner of the screen. "1% BATTERY CHARGE REMAINING."

Mary screams and lunges for the laptop.

Another message appears. "Too late, sucker."

The laptop clicks and goes dead.

She plugs the laptop into AC and powers up, repeating the mantra, "Technology is easy, technology is easy." Mary touches one key and the blue screen of death pops up like an evil genie.

Mary runs out to the school bus stop and bribes her neighbor's eight-year-old son to help. It'll cost her this time, he says. No more freebies. It costs her one Nintendo game. She writes an I.O.U.

Her geeky knight in tarnished armor rides in to save the damsel in distress. She feels the need to explain herself.

"It's me. I know. I'm not technical. I'm stupid."

The boy looks up, grunts agreement, and hits a button. The laptop whirrs happily to life.

Mary's day is off to a bad start. Her day will also have a bad middle and a bad end.

Mary tries to work from home. No matter what she does or how she configures the Internet connection, VPN will not connect her to Technogadget's intranet. No way. No how.

At 7:30 A.M., sans shower and washed hair, she throws on clothes and heads to the office.

On her way, Mary remembers that she has no money, with the possible exception of a stray penny or nickel under the front passenger seat. Since she must pay for Bobrite's lunch—Futz, the cheap S.O.B, never pays—she hangs a sharp right onto Exit Ramp 20. Horns blow and drivers give her the one-finger salute. She returns the gesture.

At the bank drive-thru, the ATM flips her off, too. She needs to withdraw \$500. The machine won't let her have it.

"Over your daily limit," warns the machine.

And the tug-of-war is on. She pushes the bankcard in, the ATM spits it out. In round six, the machine hisses and slurps. Her card disappears. It wins.

Inside the bank, smiling tellers say, "We're sorry. There is nothing we can do. The ATM service dude will need to retrieve your card."

"I need money now," says Mary.

"Do you have checks?" asks one of the grinning tellers.

"No. I carry the bankcard instead."

"Have you tried using a credit card at the ATM?" The tellers are still smiling as she stomps out of the bank.

Back at the ATM, she inserts her GiveMeDough credit card into the slot. The ATM emits a crackling laugh. SLURP! It wins again.

Mary drives off, convinced that people are the lower links in a big chain of command yanked by a computer named God. God is out to get her.

At 8:30 A.M., and late for work, Mary squeals into the only empty parking place in Technogadget's lower-forty parking lot. She hops out and prepares for a half-mile hike to the north entrance. Hang Securecard on neck. Done. Hook cell phone on belt. Done. Strap on backpack. Done. Pick up computer bag in right hand. Done. Pick up purse in left hand. Done. Hike...one, two, three.

Futz is waiting for Mary in her office, shaking head to toe. "You said you'd send me the Bobrite presentation. WHERE IS IT?"

"I couldn't connect to VPN," says Mary. She opens the computer bag, pulls out the laptop, and powers up.

"I can depend on everyone else but YOU, Mary."

She holds her breath. The laptop completes boot up and she logs in—flawless performance

"You CAN depend on me, sir."

Mary opens the Bobrite file.

The screen disappears behind an endless scroll of errors. All shapes and sizes of errors. They say things like "techno-idiot" and "uneducated" and "kiss these files and your job goodbye, toots."

"Hand over the computer, Mary. I'll give it to Sanders. He may be able to fix the mess YOU CAUSED." Futz holds out his hand.

Straight-armed, Mary holds the treasured laptop in front of Futz. Just as Futz reaches for it, she lets go, lands a kick spot-on the battery bay, and catapults the contraption across the office. It traces a perfect sparking, smoking arc to the floor.

POW! Beep, beep...POPPPPP! SCREEeech.... Silence.

Mary turns on her heels and marches out of the room and out of Technogadget Inc. forever.¹

Mary drives to Starbucks. Buys a cup of coffee and a newspaper. The newspaper feels good in her hands. She can't remember when she last touched a real honest-to-God, black-and-white, crinkly newspaper—one that wasn't displayed on a computer screen. She flips past the page shouting "EUREKA! SCIENTISTS TRAP ANTIMATTER" and turns to the advertisements. She's looking for a new job, and finds a new life instead.

The Simple Life for a Price

Heavenly Existence provides

*A variety of RETROPOLIS 2 options
to complete your ideal life.*

*Prices range from \$13.50 for a
foxhole to \$3,500 for a luxury*

*fallout shelter, complete with
rations, phone, and Geiger counter.*

All costs in 1950s dollars.

Neo-Levittown house extra.

Harvey Fauxman, CEO of Heavenly Existence Inc., hands the advertisement back to Jacob Ubik, Global Marketing Director.

"Nice follow-up to our first ad. Go nationwide with it tomorrow."

Ubik nods, turns, and marches to the door of Fauxman's executive suite. He hesitates briefly then yanks the door open and charges forward.

SNAP, SNAP, SNAP. Light flashes around, through, and on Fauxman. Reporters—bored with tracking stimulus grants, bank failures, President Obama's latest popularity ratings, and other things gone awry in America—line him up in the crosshairs of their lens and shoot. Fauxman imagines his washed out and beak-nosed image splashed across the front page of tomorrow's *Gazette*, destined to be compared to *The Simpsons'* Mr. Burns by school kids all over the city.

A dark form materializes in the center of the camera flashes and backs into Fauxman's office.

"Ladies and gentlemen, please...please. You'll have your chance to ask Mr. Fauxman questions at the press conference following today's presentation in Conference Room A. Mr. Fauxman will be glad to speak with you at that time. Thank you. Goodbye."

George Spinmeister, the Public Relations director, shuts the door, crosses the room, and hands Fauxman his cheat sheets for the presentation spiel.

"Thanks for handling the sharks, George." Fauxman thumbs through the sheets. "Put anymore words in my mouth?"

"No, Mr. Fauxman. Marketing and Legal reviewed the speech and presentation materials. You're golden."

"We've got a lot of potential Retropolis 2 residents in our audience today, George."

"By the end of today's presentation, the roads leading into Retropolis 2 will be end-to-end moving vans, sir."

Visions of dollar signs dance in Fauxman's head. "Let's do this."

Everything Looks Good on Paper

*If George Bernard Shaw were alive
today, he would say that
only on paper and at RETROPOLIS 2
has humanity yet achieved glory,
beauty, truth, knowledge, virtue,
and abiding love.*

Mary, brochure in hand, takes her seat in Conference Room A as Fauxman approaches the podium.

Fauxman scans the audience for someone to focus on, finds Mary, and begins his presentation.

"Overreliance on technology impacts our work life. A worker's productivity is measured in raps and taps on a keyboard, not in face-to-face communications with another human being.² A computer in Timbuktu hiccups and suddenly a little bank in Evansville owes the Federal Reserve billions of dollars, machines bombard patients with lethal doses of radiation, and nuclear strikes are initiated.³ Look, ma, no human hands required!"

Mary feels Fauxman's words. Any second now, computers will sneak up and wipe out her bank account, medical records, tax filings, name—any or all records of her life. And—poof!—no more Mary.

"How many of you feel that nothing you do is private anymore? Do you feel like you're being tracked by some computer program, cellphone or iPod app, maybe even the computer chip in your car?"

Several people in the audience raise their hands.

"How many of you feel that you've become obsolete—either your job was replaced by technology or you lost your job because you couldn't master technology?"

Mary's hand joins the others.

"Nobody got the e-mail that said high-tech must be balanced with high-touch. Techno-stress drove me to join the Lead Pencil Club in the late '90s, to become a 'pothole on the information highway.' I pledged to not become a biological extension of some machine."⁴

A commotion at the back of the room interrupts Fauxman. "Hey, what's going on back there?"

Five college-age kids are waving signs and shouting "IF IT'S NEW, YOU HATE IT!" and "UP WITH BIONICS!" and "NEANDERTHAL GO HOME—UGH!" Seven guards intercept them as they stomp up the center aisle.

Before being forced back, one of the demonstrators sneers at Mary and says, "Loser."

Fauxman shivers with rage and points at the youths as security escorts them from the room. "TECHNOPHILIACS! Ignore their putdowns. Technological innovation is not the be-all, end-all. People and the simple life will remedy society's ills."

The audience and Mary are on their feet, cheering and clapping.

After a few minutes, the audience settles down. "Let's move on," says Fauxman.

"I began looking for the simple life in America's past. I studied utopian experiments and communes such as Robert Owen's 1825 New Harmony Community in southwestern Indiana, Thomas Hughes' 1880 Rugby Colony in Tennessee, and 'hippie' communes such as the 1971 Farm Eco-Village in Summertown, Tennessee. All of these efforts ultimately failed. Why?"

Fauxman grips the podium and leans forward. "These utopias favored socialism over capitalism. Residents shared equally in the labors and profits of all and avoided free market competition. This flies in the face of human nature and all that is American. So, I wondered, was it possible to create a community that fulfills the human drive for success while providing the utopian elements of the simple life?"

"I returned again to America's past, and found my model for Retropolis 2. In the late '40s and early '50s, Abraham Levitt created the first Levittown on Long Island—the biggest private housing project in American history. And folks, neighbors in Levittown enjoyed visiting with each other and sitting in front of their homes on sweet summer evenings.⁵ THEY ENJOYED LIFE."

At the front of the room, Mary is daydreaming about her pop. He sits in a 1955 Buick parked at the back of her mind, talking about the good ol' 1950s. He mows greener-than-green grass in the front yard and chats with neighbors over whiter-than-white picket fences. In her dream, Mary's pop is Ward Cleaver and her mom is Betty Crocker, a living paper doll cutout from the 1950s *Picture Cook Book*...

“And YOU can enjoy life, too, at Retropolis 2. Using Federal Stimulus funds earmarked for community development, I’ve created a self-contained 1950s society that coexists with—but is separate from—2011 America. You can now enjoy carefree living in one of four basic Levittown-style homes, including the popular Cape Cod, for the low starting price of \$6,990. Your total package cost will vary, depending on the style of fallout shelter you choose.”

Grant Earnshaw, one of the reporters who snapped photos of Fauxman earlier, whispers into co-reporter Maurice Greeley’s ear, “Fauxman’s blowin’ smoke. This gig’s not for real. Bet we’ll be writing Retropolis off as another Jonestown within the year.”

Greeley nods his head. “Only thing that’s different is the color of the Flavor Aid. There’ll be a bunch of gullible Elvis impersonators in pink caddies and Ozzie and Harriet knockoffs lined up for their plastic cups like they’re at some ‘50s diner.”

Fauxman raises both hands in the air. “Thank you so much for coming today. Please, come enjoy the simple life with me at Retropolis 2. Don’t forget to stop by the tables at the back of the room to sign up for one-on-one sessions with our sales consultants.”

In the front row, Mary is smiling. She’s found “It”—the life she’s always wanted. She’s packing her mental bags as she signs up and exits the building. On her way to the parking lot, she passes the five troublemakers who interrupted Fauxman’s presentation.

Much later, after guests and reporters are gone, George Spinmeister meets with the troublemakers on a dimly-lit loading dock at the rear of Heavenly Existence’s Corporate Office Building. Money exchanges hands. He thanks them for their performance.

Things Were So Simple Back Then...

We seem to be going through a period of nostalgia, and everyone seems to think yesterday was better than today. I don't think it was, and I would advise you not to wait ten years before admitting today was great. If you're hung up on nostalgia, pretend today is yesterday and just go out and have one hell of a time.

Art Buchwald

On a Monday morning five months later, Mary wakes up in her Cape Cod dream home to the ear-friendly jingle of a Baby Ben alarm clock. It’s 5:00 a.m. She rolls over, pushes down on the alarm stop, and basks in stress-free silence.

Two hours later, she walks across greener-than-green grass in her front yard beside a whiter-than-white picket fence on her way to her job as a history teacher at Retropolis Junior High School.

Life is good. She whistles Fats Domino’s “Blueberry Hill” as she navigates the four blocks to work.

By 8:00 a.m., she's sitting at her desk as students file into the classroom. Mary finishes roll call, then double checks her list. Last week, five students were no-shows. Eight are MIA this week.

"Does anyone know what's happened to your missing classmates?"

Mary's question is met by mute indifference, shrugging shoulders, and downcast looks. She decides to discuss the issue of attendance with Principal Martin after class.

She launches into her lecture. "Our topic for discussion today is communism. Most modern forms of communism are based on the ideology created by whom, Stacy?"

Stacy Arnold pops her gum and stares at Mary over the top of her glasses. "I wouldn't know anything about that."

"Why not? Didn't you read the assignment?"

"No. Dad said my history book was nasty and burnt it."

Mary's dumbstruck. After a second, she recovers.

"Okay...Well, the social philosopher Karl Marx created the ideology on which communism is based. The first Marxist state wasn't created until the early 1900s. Michael, can you tell us what the first Marxist state was?"

"I'm outta here." Michael grabs his books and runs out the door. As if sharing a single robotic mind, the other students pack up and follow Michael out the door and up the hall.

"The Soviet Union," murmurs Mary. She is alone in the room.

A *Stepford Wives* undercurrent flows beneath Retropolis Junior High School. The swell pulses under Mary's feet, up her legs, and threatens to flow into her brain. She moves fast—out the door, down the hall, and into Principal Martin's office.

Principal Martin is there, and so is Harvy Fauxman. "Hello, Mary, we were just about to come and get you. Please, take a seat."

"I'm here representing Retropolis's Un-American Activities Committee, Mary," says Fauxman.⁶ "Your communist beliefs have us...concerned."

"WHAT," screams Mary. "I am NOT a communist."

"An in-depth investigation will answer that question," says Principal Martin.

"I believe that your curriculum on Marx and the Soviet Union is especially dangerous," says Fauxman. "You have the power to influence young American minds through your lectures. You should have practiced some measure of constraint. You're facing time in the Retropolis Detention Center, Mary."

"But it's history," pleads Mary. "You can't rewrite or ignore history. It happened."

"Are there any others, Mary?" asked Fauxman.

"Others? What others?"

"Are any of your fellow teachers slipping in contraband subjects like communism, economics according to Marx, government rule in China...?"

"Oh, good Lord!" Mary covers her face with her hands. She's living a McCarthy-era nightmare.

HONK, HONK, HONK. Sirens blare and strobe lights flash. The weekly atomic bomb attack drill is underway.

"We'll continue this conversation after the drill," says Fauxman. "Let's take cover."

Mary follows them out of Principal Martin's office. Martin and Fauxman turn right into a supply closet and dive under a couple of desks. Mary turns left, runs out the building and all the way home.

Hours pass. House doors are locked and chained. Mary moves from window to window. She gazes up and down the street looking for strange cars, checks her backyard and her neighbors' backyards for shadows, and scrutinizes every passerby who saunters along the sidewalk in front of her house.

The rotary phone rings.

Mary hesitates then picks up the receiver. "Yes?"

"We're coming to get you, Mary."

The line goes dead.

At 1:23 a.m., an unmarked black van pulls up in front of Mary's house.

With no place else to hide, Mary descends the stairs to her fallout shelter. She locks, bolts, and bars the door. Alone and in absolute quiet, she pulls a can of baked beans from her rations and attempts to open it with a can opener supplied in the shelter emergency kit. The opener gums the top of the can like a toothless old woman.

Straight-armed, Mary holds the can opener in front of her. She lets go, kicks it in the teeth, and catapults the worthless piece of junk across the shelter. The can opener traces a perfect metallic arc to the south wall and clangs to the floor.

Notes

1. Fictional content generated from readings on the source of technological stress and resulting issues, see Weil, Rosen 1-8, 23-24, 49-63, 73, 177-188.
2. Fictional content generated from reading about Zuboff's study, see Tenner 180-181.
3. Fictional content generated from readings on the computer software unreliability and dangers, see Tenner 188-189.
4. Fictional content generated from reading about the Lead Pencil Club, see Henderson.
5. For more on Levittown, see Kaledin 61-64.
6. Fictional content generated from readings on McCarthy, the Un-American Activities Committee, and life in the 1950s, see Kaledin 76-91, 117-120.

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TALKING IN CIRCLES BY RAININ HASH

Boris and Katja are going through a messy divorce and their oldest is failing History. Katja's cousin Melly is sleeping with her dentist's brother Harold, whose dog ran away last week. Said dog is the father of Kaitlin's new puppy. Kaitlin's dad is the CEO of a failing ad company. Said Ad Company employs Mark, who has a cold sore, contracted from the water bottle he shared with his friend John last week at pickup basketball. John was in a car accident some months ago and met Nurse Mary, and they currently have a good thing going. They're not at third base yet, but Mary has been thinking about what she would wear just in case. She'll buy the dress from Ally, the cashier at the mall. Ally is moonlighting as a barfly until she finds "Mr. Right." Her uncle Terry was in the Vietnam War, where he sustained shrapnel in his right thigh. By weird coincidence, the nurse Mary's grandmother operated on Terry in the field about seventeen miles west of Da Nang. They conceived the child that would become Mary's father, Andrew.

Bob is an alcoholic with a phobia of thumbtacks and green letter-openers. He works at OfficeMax and lives in perpetual fear.

Bob's brother Harry wrote a children's book about ants. This book won a Newbury award in 2006. Kaitlin, the girl with the puppy, has this book on her shelf. The puppy has chewed on this book. Kaitlin and her family live across the street from Ruby, a retired schoolteacher. She taught John and Mark fourth grade social studies. Her husband Nathan was in the Air Force when London was under attack during the air raids of WWII. Nathan's cousin Ralph was a musician in Ontario to avoid the draft. Nathan does not speak to Ralph because of his draft-dodging. Ralph's daughter Cheryl is a failed actress living in a trailer south of San Diego with her boyfriend Allen. Cheryl's daughter Cassy is dating the son of a construction worker, Bill. Bill is the direct male-line descendant of Charlemagne. This manifests in Bill's taste in gaudy men's jewelry. Bill is the second cousin of Cassy's mother's boyfriend Allen on his mother's side, but that family was thought to be lost in an earthquake. Bill's mother is a recovering breast-cancer survivor who knew the man who met the man who sold a pair of shoes to Walt Disney. Cassy's favorite movie is The Lion King. Simba is the name of Kaitlin's puppy's brother who lives with a little boy named Sam. Sam's older sister once stole a cell phone and served six weeks of community service. She is responsible for leaving a broken bottle in the street, which caused John's accident that caused John to meet Mary.

Mary's sister Sally once caught a cold from a dirty bathroom faucet. This faucet was used by David Bowie when he was eleven years old. Eleven is Sally's lucky number. Sally is currently married to a man who attended a casting call for Footloose and was the third choice for the boyfriend character. Ruby the retired schoolteacher once showed Footloose

in class because she really liked the soundtrack. The song Footloose by Kenny Loggins was playing on the radio when John had the accident that caused him to meet Mary. John was driving a Ford Taurus the exact shade of green that described the colour of the pants David Bowie was wearing on the same day. David Bowie happens to be one of Boris's favorite musicians. Boris once sang "Ground Control to Major Tom" at a talent show in Brisbane, Australia on the first cruise he took with Katja, three years after they were married. Katja was once the college roommate of a girl who slept with a guy who claimed to be a roadie for KISS, but he was actually a grocery bagger. The grocery he worked for once sold several bags of romaine lettuce that contained frogs.

The frogs caused a massive recall of romaine lettuce in the greater San Diego area. Cheryl almost bought one of these frog-contaminated bags of lettuce when her boyfriend Allen called and said he wanted steak instead. The steaks were expensive, which caused Cheryl to be a few dollars short on her electric bill. As a result, her freezer shorted out and a piece of frozen cake Cheryl had saved from her first marriage went bad. Cheryl had originally been married to William, who was known as Wobbly Willy in high school because of an inner ear problem that interfered with his balance. He once stumbled and broke the school's glass awards case. To this day he claims that the scar he sustained from this accident was from when he wrestled tigers during his Peace Corps trip to Sumatra, which is a bald-faced lie. He used to relate these stories to Cassy at night before she went to sleep. Cassy, as a result, dreamed about tigers that tried to eat her. The dreams usually ended with her father, William, dressed as Indiana Jones, coming to save her, usually in some kind of horse chariot. Bizarrely enough, Cassy adores tigers and is mortally terrified of horses. Her boyfriend Bill bought her a stuffed tiger at a garage sale in Baja California, where Bob the alcoholic's brother Harry lives on the earnings of his popular children's books. Harry sold his Tennessee home to a woman named Janet, who has an obsession with Rocky Horror Picture Show. Her license plate says DMTJNT, recalling a line from RHPS, "Dammit, Janet, I love you." Janet has sworn to name her first son Rocky.

Rocky happens to be the name of a third puppy (from the same litter mentioned before) who now belongs to a homeless man who hitched a ride to Houston to pick the romaine lettuce that contained the frogs that caused a massive recall in San Diego. This man's name is Kenny. Kenny once saved a child from a runaway shopping cart loaded with bricks. The child was the son of a minor film star from the 90's who was, until his recognition, an adult film star in the 80's. One of the adult films he starred in was found in the apartment across the hall from Jeffery Daumer's cousin's best friend's sister's boyfriend. It is not known if Mr. Daumer has seen this film. What is known is that in the first grade Mr. Daumer used to sit next to a Marty Marzheim, who moved with his family to Alaska in 1985. Marty once met Chris McCandless, who later died of starvation in the Alaskan wilderness and had a movie made about him. This movie, *Into The Wild*, was the

cause of the epic battle between Carson Dowey and his now ex-best friend Michael Vick, who has no connection to the famous football quarterback. On the night of September 24th, 2008, Carson broke Michael's nose because Michael called Mr. McCandless a "moron". The doctor who treated Michael's nose once visited a flop house in Germany and slept with a nice girl who had no business working there. The doctor now has twin daughters that he knows nothing about. The girls, Moira and Vanessa, are the German version of the Doublemint Twins, advertising beer while dressed in tight lederhosen. The messy divorce between Boris and Katja was instigated by an encounter one night while Katja was on a long girl's weekend out with her old college roommate. They had a little too much to drink and went to a popular drag club where they discovered Boris doing an erotic pole dance routine dressed in lederhosen. Wouldn't you be failing history too, if you found out that your father was wearing lederhosen?



Photography by S.G. Traylor

HONOR KILLING BY AMY BALLENGER

*I look down and say
She's so young, barely 20 if that
Around her eyes there are the faintest of wrinkles
Evidence of the many times she laughed or smiled*

I am not a part of this scene; I have no connection to the woman lying on the ground half covered by the white sheet of the dead. I am just a passerby, wandering along the streets of this typical American suburb. Like the others gathered behind the crime scene tape, standing on tiptoes, necks straining for a better view, I was attracted by the flashing lights and the growing whispers. Like mosquitoes, we were drawn in by the lights, and now we are leeching off this emotional moment to gain some little tidbit to entertain others. Later this week, when people are still describing how the woman looked, they'll be able to say they saw it all. They will talk how young the woman appeared lying on the ground. There will be many bragging that they were close enough to see the tiny laugh lines around her eyes. She must have been very happy to have lines when she is so young.

*Those lines are the only traces of that smile now
As her mouth is frozen in a permanent and silent scream
There is dried blood running down the side of her face
Like an ugly scar splitting what had once been whole*

There is no trace of any smiles now, not on her face, nor on the voyeurs gathered for the show. It wouldn't be appropriate for them to smile after all, since this is a play of tragedy. The tragedy of murder is laid out before an all too eager audience. The victim is the woman of course, since she is one lying on the ground with blood running down her face, and the white sheet still only have covering her. The blood trail makes it look as if her face has been split in two. The crowd is muttering now, saying that the sheet should be pulled upward and over. Everyone has already seen how she looks now and they memorized it enough for an accurate description for the next morning's round of phone calls and early get-togethers. The lines will be buzzing tomorrow as it is told that her eyes were open wide and her mouth was still open in a silent scream for help, mercy, something, or anything but this. Yet help did not come in time for her, in time to stop this horror. The horror of being murdered, and of ending up on YouTube, if those teenagers' cells phones are correct. Yes, the three teenage boys in their little varsity jackets are crowding as close to the barricade as they can get. The way the three are holding up their phones it is obvious that they are using the video recorders in the phones to film the crime scene. One of them is downloading it right now. I wonder what heading they are going to use; Woman Murdered, or Sideshow Attraction, which is what they are turning this into. This truly is the typical American town.

*There is a ring on the ground next to her
Gold and broken from where a boot had smashed it
As if trying to erase its existence
And the marriage that it represented*

There are a couple of cops talking just in front of the barrier. They're whispering, but it's one of those conversations; the kind where you whisper in just such a way that everyone can hear you. The kind of whispering that happens when you want people to overhear, just like the crowd is doing now. These cops are young, and it shows in the way that they're playing it up for the audience. Maybe they're hoping to get included in the video. Become the most downloaded cops on YouTube, if not the entire web. Maybe that's why they keep talking about the broken wedding ring. It's hers, a simple gold band to symbolize a lifelong commitment. It's broken, they keep saying, smashed into pieces beside her. Her killer apparently ripped it from her finger, leaving little trails of blood from where his fingernails scratched her. Then he smashed it under his booted heel, over and over again, until it shattered in to pieces. Strange, that ring meant lifelong commitment, and yet its life ended with its wearer. Stranger still, rings like that are supposed to be strong, as strong as their wearers', yet both broke under a killer's anger.

*The police are arresting her father
The father looks proud of murdering his daughter
And leaving her lying like a piece of trash on the street
Such as a paper coffee cup or the remains of an unraveled tire
Discarded on the side of the highway
He's bragging now that he has gotten rid of her and her filth*

Every head in the crowd is turning now, as someone starts shouting at the top of their lungs. It's almost funny as we all move at once, not wanting to miss a glimpse as the drama unfolds on the real-life stage. It's almost like following the ball in a tennis match, left to right to left to right. There in the far left circus ring, the audience sees a man being dragged towards a waiting car. Only the man is no smiling clown, and the car is a black & white, not a tiny little that must be bigger on the inside. It's hard to make out his features in the flashing lights, but as my eyes strain, I can see just enough of his face. He's Middle Eastern. As hard as it is to make out his features, it is not hard at all to hear him bragging. Bragging about how he murdered her, and left her lying out there for all to see. He's calling her trash, and the cops are whispering again. Saying the man was the woman's father. Her father killed the flesh of his flesh, the bone of his bone, and the blood of his blood. His blood/her blood is staining his hands, but he is not crying out for the spots to go. No, he wants everyone to see him standing there proud, and his daughter thrown out of the street like garbage. His daughter, who is still lying there only half covered by the sheet. Why won't they finally cover her up? Give her back her dignity, and stop giving him what he wants. He wants to strip her of her dignity, her pride, her ability to call herself a person even in death. Instead, she is just lying there for everyone to stare at. She is not a person anymore, she's their entertainment. She is a thing to point at and to react to, not someone to mourn and grieve for, or to rally around and say that this has to stop. That this is not right, and that

this woman is not an empty coffee cup to be dropped outside the car window, on the way to work.

*The filth, as he calls it, looks so sweet and delicate
A perfect little newborn girl, almost a china doll
Now if only the medic can revive that innocent doll
Smothered by her grandfather because her mother
Eloped with the blonde haired, blue eyed man
Who kneels next to his murdered wife*

Oh, called back to the center ring now, as the paramedics call to each other. Their movements are frantic, and rightfully so. The woman is of course beyond, but perhaps her child can be saved. It's a newborn, a perfect little girl lying on the ground next to her mother's body. The medics are trying to get her breathing again. Apparently, after killing his daughter, the father smothered his grandchild, all because of who fathered that child. The father of the child, the husband of the woman is the blond-haired, blue-eyed man kneeling on the ground next to his fallen family. He's praying, with his hands balled up by his chin, eyes shut as his tears fall, all the while rocking back and forth on those knees of his. He's begging for his daughter's life, pleading for mercy from a God that did not stop this act of horror committed by a man determined to erase what he deemed sin. And what sin did that newborn have. How a child that had barely entered the world could have committed such a crime that death was the only punishment that fit. Those teenagers again, with their stupid phones, recording every second the medics struggle. What headline will that baby have; Newborn CPR, Medical Alert, or the much more accurate Innocent Smothered For No Good Reason Other Than The Fact That They Can.

*They call this honor killing,
They say that it is their right
Because the woman chose her own path
That the rest of their family was dishonored
And only the death of their daughter could
Remove the stain of her betrayal*

The cops are whispering again, and the audience, this crowd of busybodies is working to harvest every piece of gossip from the vine. The father is claiming that the killing was justified, an honor killing. Honor killing, they are whispering as they look close to spitting in disgust, he looks proud as he says that he had the right, that his daughter shamed him and his family. That she was vile and the act tainted the reputation and good standing of the rest of their family. Me, I'd have to disagree, especially since the cops are saying the vile act, was marrying the guy she loved, and not the *30-years-older-than-her* man her family picked.

*Yet as the newborn finally cries
I can't help but wonder
With all the blood of the daughter
And the tears of her husband
And the child that will have to live
With the knowledge of the horror
How can this be in any way honorable*

Finally, there is a sound that truly pierces the night, and brings everything to a halt. The baby is crying, crying and breathing. The husband/father looks up from his balled up hands, still rocking and crying, but finally looking somewhat relieved. His wife is gone, but their daughter lives. But what kind of life will she live. How will he tell her when she asks what happened to her mommy? I watch a while longer as the medics bundle up the baby and hustle father and daughter to an ambulance. I glance once more at woman under the white death sheet. It's finally been pulled up, and she has been given back a little bit of her dignity in death at last, even if it is a bit too late. Everyone in the now dispersing crowd has gotten a good look at what was done, and is prepared to tell all. I linger for a few moments more, and study the murder stage laid out before me. The woman's father called this a cleansing of sin from his family; everything is clean because he threw his daughter out dead onto the street. Still I wonder, what is honor, and how can this act be in any way honorable? I have heard of honor and have always known it to be something connected to doing the right thing; to living according to a certain set of standards. Yet he and so many others call murder honorable. He murdered his child and grandchild, for all that she breathes again. He left her where all could see and gawk as if she were in the center-ring. But she wasn't center-ring, she was dead, and the source of this crowds amusement, not that they would admit it. At least not until they find out the number of times it has been downloaded, and printed in the paper about, and how many times they can embellish the details until it's too obvious. As I finally walk away, I cry as I realize how monstrous we all are.

A TEENAGER'S MISTAKE BY SUZY MILHOAN

I heard my parents, the doctors and my boyfriend whispering in the corner of the room when I began to wake up. I had a terrible headache and my tongue was so swollen, I couldn't close my mouth. My eyes were blurry and I wasn't able to lift my head because of the pain. The first thought that entered my mind was that I didn't want to wake up. I pretended to be asleep for a few minutes. I, mistakenly, thought my parents didn't know I was pregnant. I was afraid of what they were going to say, or more importantly, what was my Dad going to do? I remembered my parents did know I was pregnant because my boyfriend, Jay, and I had told them two weeks previously when I was seven months pregnant, a senior in high school. Slowly, I began to fit the pieces together of what had happened the night before I ended up here.

I had had a horrible headache. I asked Jay to bring me over some Tylenol. He did and I took them and lay back down on the couch in the living room downstairs. My head felt like it was going to explode from all the pain. Not only was my head pounding to an unknown beat, but I had also been puking all night long. In the middle of the night my Dad must have heard me running back and forth to the bathroom and came down and asked, "Are you alright?"

"Yes," I snorted.

I actually wasn't but I didn't want to tell him what was going on. He and I had never had a conversation, which exchanged more than one to two words in my entire life. I didn't feel like opening up a conversation at this time. I went back to sleep and the next morning my Mom found me on the couch convulsing. I had bitten my tongue almost completely off as my head thrashed wildly back and forth. I had white froth coming from my nose and mouth. My arms and legs were flying all over as if I was possessed. I remembered her wiping a cold, wet rag on my head and face. She was notorious for trying to fix our aches and pains with a cold rag; it is one of the things I still laugh about today. She would say, "The hell with doctors. We never went to a doctor when I was growing up."

My mother, Darlene was, and still is, some kind of character. Her beautiful smile and eyes light up like the sun. She was, often, mistaken for our sister. Even after having nine kids, she still had a good figure and was very beautiful. She kept her fighting spirit, although, she had been punched, slapped, choked, kicked, and thrown. Her head had been slammed inside of walls, her throat stomped, and her knee kicked repeatedly. These were just some of the things she endured living with an abusive husband since she was married to him at age fifteen.

What can be said of a monster you are forced to share your life with fearing every second you would do something wrong and get beat or your mother would get beat in place of you for your mistakes? That was how I felt living with my Dad. It didn't take much to set him off and when he went off, he exploded in all directions like the fireworks we used to see as kids at Ceraland, a local park, in Columbus, Indiana. There were no limits on what he would do when he got mad. He destroyed anything in his path, whether it was an inanimate object, or a living, breathing soul. He didn't discriminate on who received the beatings around our house. If he couldn't pin something on one of us, he beat us all. His beatings included punching, throwing, kicking, slapping, or hitting us with belts. One summer we came home from the store and one by one he beat us with a belt. He never cared if we were hit with the buckle or the belt end. We didn't know what was happening or why. He continued to beat everyone and was about to go after my mom when my little sister Anna, who was only five, screamed, "Stop!"

My Dad then chased Anna, wildly, around our kitchen table. I can remember seeing the craziness in his eyes and wondering what he was going to do to her. We had one of those old country kitchens, quite large, with a large table and chairs to seat all of us in the family. As Dad was rounding a corner of the table, my other sister Kathy stepped in front of him to keep him from Anna. He picked her up and threw her across the room. She landed on a sweeper and she stayed on the ground holding her back and grimacing from the pain. She wouldn't give him the satisfaction of crying. For some reason, he stopped chasing Anna and began to beat our Mom. At first, he was hitting her with the same belt he used on us like she was one of his kids. That must not have been enough for him because he then started punching her, dragging her on the floor around by her hair and kicking her everywhere. We were all crying and scared. To escape into our own world and remove ourselves from the guilt of not being able to stop him, we would develop temporary obsessive-compulsive disorder while our mom was being beaten. We would begin to scurry about the room, picking up pieces of glass, papers, furniture or whatever else my Dad had thrown around the room. This time, he had thrown all the food out of the freezer into the floor and we all scuttled about picking it up and taking it to the trash, meanwhile, the screams from our mother were deafening. It sounded like the scream of a lamb when caught in the mouth of a wolf.

After my Dad quit destroying our mom, piece-by-piece, he went upstairs to his room. We all gathered around our Mom to assess the damage and help her up from the floor. We were afraid to look at her; afraid of what we would see. We got cold, wet rags to wipe the blood from her mouth and nose. After we could see she was alive, we went to our rooms, silent, empty, whimpering and licking our wounds like puppies trying to get the mud off their paws. We later learned that the screen door to the porch had been left open a tiny bit and Dad said the food had gone bad in the freezer. The porch door was ajar not the

freezer door. It was just an excuse for him. He was probably in a bad mood and wanted to get his frustrations out. It didn't matter to him who he used as a punching bag. That specific day, it was all of us.

I tried to quit thinking about the horrible memory as I lay in my bed in ICU. My body tried to fight back as I drifted in and out of consciousness over the next several days. ICU looked like a mad scientist's lab. It was cold, impersonal and I saw several monitors and bags of solutions hanging on a pole with lines coming into me. There was one tube going out that was very distinct. It was a large, hot and sticky tube that was taped to my leg and led to a bag hanging on the bed railing filled with some yellow solution. I felt like a guinea pig that had been experimented on and wasn't sure what they were going to do to me next. I was scared out of my mind. I was only seventeen years old, these things aren't supposed to happen to someone that age I screamed inside my head. At times when I was awake, I would think about how stupid I was to put us into this situation. It wasn't hard to figure out why I had hidden my pregnancy but I wished I had done things differently. I started to remember when I first found out I was sick.

One day while I was getting ready for school, I noticed my face was swollen quite a bit. Over the next few days, my hands and feet began swelling too. I quickly looked like the Michelin tire man and began to experience headaches. My sister told my Mom I needed to go to the doctor. I went and a simple pee test confirmed I had toxemia, now called pre-eclampsia. The doctor told me then, "If you get a bad headache or start vomiting, you need to call me immediately. I don't care what time of night, or morning it is, you call me directly."

Two weeks later I had that chance to make that call, but I didn't. Why? I was too introverted to talk on the phone during that phase of my life. Had I known my life and my son's life was on the line, I would have made it immediately.

Finally, after a total of five days in ICU and no success at getting my blood pressure down, my doctor showed up in his green scrubs and explained the only way to cure this was to deliver the baby.

He said, "Your blood pressure is still extremely high and that can cause you to have a stroke and can definitely affect your baby's brain."

The disease I had was notorious for making pregnant women retain water that would cause swelling and high blood pressure. At one point my blood pressure was 280 / 180 and that was when they had some medicine in me to control it. I have no idea what it was when I was convulsing. The doctor wanted to check to ensure the baby's lungs were mature enough to breathe on its own before he would get me into surgery. My mind went reeling again and thinking about the baby. First and foremost, this baby wasn't ready to

come out. My due date was still six weeks away. This was 1980, how well could they take care of pre-mature babies, I thought. I cried because I was scared for my unborn child. As they wheeled me down the hallway, several of my family gathered around to see me before surgery. There wasn't anything they could do or say that would make me feel better. My Mom leaned down and said in her gentle voice, "I guess you're going to leave this hospital with a baby, huh?" I cried even harder.

My many prayers were answered and my son, Vince, was born healthy on January 22, 1980, even after I had put him through this horror. He weighed six pounds and seven ounces and was nineteen and a half inches long. Because of the prematurity, he had no eyebrows or eyelashes and was very thin. He was alive and well and I continue to thank God to this day. I was amazed my Dad didn't kill or beat me. If he had beaten us for leaving a screen door open a little, what was he going to do to me for being pregnant, I wondered at the time? Maybe he was afraid to hit me for fear of doing harm to my baby. He had caused my mother to lose her first child, a boy, by hitting her in the stomach when she was pregnant in 1953. That might have crossed his mind and why he didn't do anything to me. I would hope this was why and that he might have had some compassion for my unborn son, even though, I didn't think he had any for my mother, my siblings or me.

Reflecting back now, everything I experienced happened because I was a scared, invincible and naive teenage girl. I didn't seek medical attention when I first found out I was pregnant. I hid my pregnancy from friends and family. I was scared, scared of my Dad, scared of everything. I was also embarrassed that I was pregnant and didn't want anyone to know. I felt alone in the world. I isolated myself from everyone but my boyfriend. We had begun to buy baby clothes and hide them. I can't really explain what I was thinking. What was I going to do when the baby did come? Hide it? I was so stressed from holding the secret in that my health began to deteriorate and my baby and I almost died. My entire pregnancy was spent trying to conceal it. I chose a different route when I became pregnant with my second son two years later. I went to the doctor early, took my vitamins, and ate correctly. I never wanted to experience what I had gone through with my first child again.



Art by Cynthia Scott

A VAUDEVILLE MEMOIR: TOPSY-TURVY BY CYNTHIA SCOTT

At 10 o'clock in the morning after another late night, five bleary-eyed but freshly shaved men and seven corseted and coiffed women slip quietly into chairs at a boarding house dining room for their breakfast. Fragrances of bay-rum aftershave and Ivory soap mingle with the aroma of fried eggs, toast, and bacon. When everyone has swallowed a few sips of coffee, they are ready to speak to each other. (Rule: Anyone coming to the table feeling alert and sociable must say nothing until the others are fully awake.) This group travels together by train through five Midwest states.

It is June, marking the last half of the 1917 vaudeville season. This morning, the Kentucky Belles are in Noblesville, Indiana. They completed one matinee and two shows nightly on Monday and Tuesday, and will be boarding the train to Piqua, Ohio tomorrow. An advertisement in the paper announces tonight's final performance:

OPERA HOUSE
TONIGHT

The Kentucky Belles
Big Musical Comedy Presents that Musical Review

"HOTEL TOPSY TURVY"

A Laugh Every Minute, New Songs, Dances, and
Comedy and a Big Triangle Photoplay in 5 Parts.
Lillian Gish in "DAPHNE AND THE PIRATES."
Don't forget this is a Triangle.

Prices: Lower Floor 15c Balcony 10c

Coming Next Week, "The Carolina Lillies."

This morning, the manager of the Kentucky Belles, Paul Zallee, enters the dining room fifteen minutes after the group has begun eating and chatting. He is carrying a newspaper. He taps his water glass with a spoon to get the attention of his cast. "Good morning all. I have good news. Listen to this piece by Thomas Wright about yesterday's performance. It could bring us another crowd today." Paul begins to read:

A Musical Farce at the Opera House: There was standing room only at the Opera House last night where the Kentucky Belles gave an encore performance of the 1898 musical comedy "The Hotel Topsy-Turvy." It was a perfect vehicle for them to display their

trademark variety of musical numbers, dancing, and comedic interplay. The plot is not unusual: a young man connives with a friend to prevent his lady love from being married to a middle-aged Italian count, whose betrothal was arranged by her family. Added farcical elements and the absurd setting make it a play of obviously ridiculous actions.

“Boy, you can say that last part again, but without the fancy words. That story was way beyond crazy without any help from us!” interrupts Ed Miller, the red-headed pianist who always has an opinion.

“Well, yeah. Of course it was; that’s why we picked it,” pipes in Curley Wakefield. He had to restate the obvious. Maybe that’s why he always played the straights guy opposite the comics – taking everything at face value. “Let Paul read the article.” Paul continues reading about the plot of the play:

The two young men invite a company of strolling actors into a vacant private mansion which has been turned into a hotel for this event. The girl being courted arrives at the supposed hotel with her father and cousin and the foreign count. Unknown to them, one of the actors begins to impersonate the count at every opportunity. The situation is further complicated when the elderly owners of the house return from their travels unexpectedly. The scene of the plot is full of potential complications because of all the actors pretending to be other people.

Ernie Johnson the trap drummer raps his spoon on the table and says “Do you get it? You guys were actors pretending to be actors who were pretending to be other people. How weird is that, huh?” The others know Ernie’s head is full of rhythm and not much else. They shush him and tell Paul to go on.

The performance included a wild food fight and romantically funny serenades accompanied with tin pan percussion. Can-can dancing, acrobatics, and singing intersperse every slap-stick accident, fumbled trick, and stumbling chase. By the end of the second act, a stage covered with food, smashed plates, seltzer water, champagne bottles and soiled table linens confirms the topsy-turvy condition of the hotel.

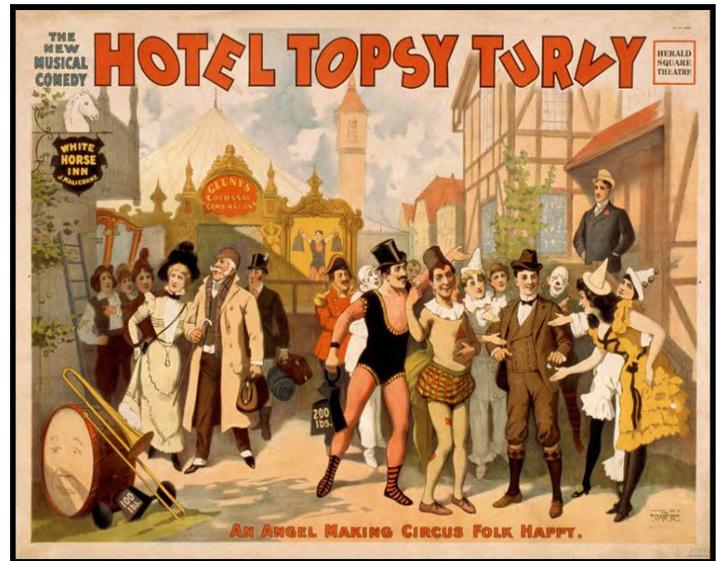
“I’ll say,” adds Blanche Watson, a chorus girl with ruddy complexion who dislikes bending over to pick anything off the floor. “What a mess that was to clean! Topsy-turvy means a lot of work after the fun.”

“Yeah and what about dancing on that slippery mess?” May Lilly adds her worries. “We could have fallen and broken a leg on all that stuff. The funny act wouldn’t be so funny then.”

Paul understands their concerns and says “Well yes, those are the chances we take in this business, but listen to this. It gets better, and you might change your minds about this play.” He continues to read the entertainment review:

Although not famous like Edwin Foy who first played the part of Lebeau the clown in the original New York City production, Leslie Kell was very amusing and convincing in the role. Likewise, the Kentucky Belles’ own Nell Larkin sang cleverly to mimic the Broadway star Marie Dressler, in her part as proprietress of Cluny’s Colossal Combination.

Leslie and Nell grin. The rest of the cast cheers and claps hands. It is not often that a reviewer of small-time shows will single out performers by name for accolades. Paul reads on:



In this observer’s opinion, all of the cast knew their stage business and carried it off admirably. Even the seven chorus girls wearing hosiery and lingerie to modest advantage were trained to perform in a manner suitable for family entertainment. Most important, well-conducted and orchestrated music lifted this production above what could have been merely a mass of confusion and noise. Composers Victor Roger and Lionel Monckton would be pleased with this artful rendition of their work by the Kentucky Belles musical director Garnett Hansen.

“Did you hear that, Garnett?” Paul asks. “All your hard work really paid off.” Garnett blushes, but doesn’t have anything to say. The others speak for him.

Emma Marr, the prima donna who played the part of the wrongly betrothed girl, declares “I’m glad he taught me how to say the words, especially in that French *Toujours* song. And, he helped Curley and I learn the duet timing for *How to Kiss*. That was a tricky one.”

“Yeah,” says Ed, “the same is true for the house orchestra. That sheet music was hard to read and some of the guys in the horn section didn’t understand how parts of it should sound. Garnett doctored the score to give them a smoother time of it.”

“Say,” announces Pansy Hart who created her own fancy stage name and is always pestering the others to do the same, “We ought to start calling Garnett “Doc” for doctoring up the music. What do you think of that?”

The others look at each other and smile in agreement; the response is unanimous. “Doc” it is, and even Garnett is amused by that moniker.

He insists, however, that the nickname not be published in their advertisements. It isn’t professional and won’t fit the musical conductor image he tries to project by wearing a formal white tie and tails. Paul brings the conversation back to the original subject. “As well as we did last night and the night before,” Paul warns, “it won’t pay to get over confident. Surely you must realize that there was another reason for the crowd. Think about it now. In addition to our play, what made last night so special?” Paul pauses so they can take that in. Some of the cast are looking puzzled.



Doc makes a guess: “Was it the new flick at the end--the Triangle photoplay starring Lillian Gish? That one was longer and better than the shorts that usually follow our act.”



Theatrical poster to *Daphne and the Pirate*

“That’s it.” Paul answers. “Movies are getting more and more attention. Look at how much they have changed just in the last seven years. Used to be, you’d see a few minutes of a horse galloping across a field, a prize fight, moving automobiles and trains, or Buffalo Bill and Annie Oakley in shooting competitions. They helped to clear out the theater for the next show. But now, you can see real photo plays --with popular stars like Lillian Gish, Douglas Fairbanks, and Mary Pickford--that run as long as fifty minutes.”

“Well that’s a good thing, isn’t it?” Leslie makes a point. “Anything that brings in the crowd is good for our pocketbooks. We should be happy that movies are attracting more attention. It’s a good deal for the families that come to see us. They get to see real people on the stage plus they can marvel at the latest moving pictures. I like those films too. Aren’t they amazing?”

Garnett asks Paul, “so what do you mean by pointing out the attraction of these longer photoplays? Is there something wrong with those that we can’t see?”

Paul shares his concern. "No, there's nothing wrong with those films, and I agree with Leslie that they are good for our business. I'm just worried about our future if they continue to gain more and more attention. I read in *Billboard* and other weeklies that a lot of vaudeville theaters in New York and Philadelphia are switching completely over to just movies. They no longer book any vaudeville acts."

Leslie counters that fear by remarking "Ah, that won't happen everywhere! Sure, movies are more popular than dime museums, circuses, and street carnivals now – but vaudeville still out numbers all the movie theaters. Why, those movies don't even have any sound. How can a black and white moving picture with no sound compete with real breathing, singing, speaking people?"

Curly wants to agree with Leslie, but points out one thing. "I don't know, Leslie. Maybe there's no way to put sound with movies now, but remember how amazed we were when Thomas Edison invented the phonograph? Don't you think someone will figure out how to combine sound and motion together someday?"

The discussion continues until it is time to get to work. They must prepare for the matinee performance starting at noon. Garnett is thinking about the future now and wondering how long he can continue with the Kentucky Belles. Maybe it's not such a great idea to make vaudeville his career. He has to quit in August anyway when he turns twenty-one; it will be time to report to the draft board and help the war effort overseas.

Still, it was a grand time he had this past year. He has lots of clippings for his scrapbook and has polished his music skills. Maybe he can play piano again somewhere else when the war is over. It just won't be in vaudeville. Soon, the movies will be the main attraction and the stage acts will be last on the bill or gone all together. Vaudeville will be tossed topsy-turvy.

INSANE OR NOT BY SUZY MILHOAN

John Nicholas (Nichols) woke up on March 14, 1935, thinking it would be like any other day. He was married to Ellen and lived with her and their two young sons in Columbus, Indiana. He loved fishing and taking the older boy, Gerald, swimming. The younger son, Allen, who would become my father, was only two months old at the time. John's thought about this day could never have been so wrong. He and Ellen had an argument and words were blasted back and forth, typical of many married couples when they argue. The ending result of this fight was different. Police officers were called out and he was dragged off to jail. John never hit, pushed, or even touched Ellen. What had he done that was so wrong? They had arguments before, but he never ended up freezing on a cold, hard floor being surrounded by bars.

Several doctors came in to talk to John while he was in jail. He was surprised when they began asking about his mental state. They asked him how well he got along with his wife, children, and other family members. He stated, over and over, that he loved his family and would never harm them. John told them he worked at Noblitt & Sparks for the past six years. He also stated he had been sick the past winter and not able to work. He had sunk into a depression because of his lack of work and money. He felt bad because he wasn't able to take care of his family the way he knew he should. This kept him up at night and he was unable to sleep well.

The next thing John knew, he was committed and whisked off to the Southeastern Indiana Hospital for the insane. He was confused, shocked and not sure why he was sent there for ninety days for observation. He wondered how things like this could happen.

John was given a physical when he was committed to the hospital. His medical record stated he was 5' 6 ½" and weighed 112 pounds. His waist was 27" and his chest was 31". His eyes and hair were black. The report stated he was quiet and cooperative. Later, his ethnicity was questioned as Dr. Francis Prenatt documented on his assessment record, "The patient is a male, 30 years of age, allegedly white, but showing features highly characteristic of Indian physiognomy... his hair is long, coarse, straight and black."



John Nicholas (Nichols) 30

John was finally interviewed on June 6th with several doctors and nurses. His handwriting sample was taken. It reflects feelings of despair and sadness as he learned he would not be leaving the asylum that day.

Specimen handwriting 6-6-'35.
John Nicholas
R 3 East Choubr
dada
This is a dark and gloomy
day

John's handwriting: June 6, 1935

This meeting was documented the next day (see next two exhibits).

JOHN NICHOLAS--#7509.

DR. FRANCIS PRENATT,
June 7, 1935.

Dr. J. W. Milligan
Dr. G. A. Estel
Dr. Guy W. Hamilton
Dr. Francis Prenatt
Dr. J. K. Pollock
Mrs. S. N. Bauer
Mrs. A. O. Frost.

Diagnosis, 18-184 DEMENTIA PRAECOX,
PARANOID TYPE.

- Q Good morning. A Good morning.
Q How are you feeling this morning? A All right.
Q Has your health usually been pretty good? A Yes, pretty fair.
Q Lived the most of your life in the vicinity of Columbus? A I was born and raised in Kentucky but I have worked in the factories at Columbus.
Q How old were you when you came to Indiana? A I was young. I have been in Indiana about 14 years.
Q Have you been working most of the time in the factories in Columbus? A Yes.
Q Ever do any farming? A Yes, every time I got laid off in the factory I worked on a farm cutting wheat and different things.
Q You got along very nicely with that line of work? A Yes, sir.
Q What kind of work did you do in the factory? A I ran a band saw--it was a steel saw.
Q Were you a rather skilled sawyer? A Yes, rather. I got pretty good wages. I worked 40 hours a week at .35 an hour. I was satisfied with it.
Q How long have you been in the habit of drinking? A I haven't drunk much.
Q How long have you been drinking, did you begin when just a boy? A No, sir. I was about 20 when I began drinking.
Q The habit has been growing worse during the past few years? A No, I always tried to save my money.
Q How did you happen to come down here? A I just don't know. I was sent for 90 days but I didn't get out in that time.
Q Were you inclined sometimes to wander away from home? A No.
Q How long were you in jail there? A I just don't know.
Q Do you think you should have been taken to jail? A No, and Mr. McNutt didn't think so either.
Q Had you been drinking any? A No, I was sick. The compensation doctor laid me off and told me to take a rest for two weeks.
Q Did you think that people were trying to hurt you? A No, I was not afraid of anybody and I stayed at home.
Q Did you do anything or say anything that led the folks to think you might hurt the children? A No.
Q You think that you knew what you were doing at all times? A Until I got sick. Then I was too weak to hurt anyone.
Q How long were you sick? A Almost all last winter.
Q Were you laid up in bed? A Part of the time I was and part I wasn't. I had to take care of my family.
Q What came up that made the family afraid of you? A My wife wasn't afraid of me. I don't know what made them afraid. I never had any intention of hurting anybody. I loved my babies and they loved me. My factory boss seemed to like me pretty well. He always gave me a job when I went back.
Q How long were you sick and not able to work? A I was sick about all of last winter. I just knocked around. I had a light job. My mind was in pretty good shape all that time.
Q Were you drinking pretty hard during that time? A No.

Q What are you planning on doing when you get home? A I am planning on working in the factory.

Q You like that work pretty well? A Yes, sir.

Q Do you remember the date that you came here? A I think it was March 20th.

Q Did you know where you were coming when you came? A No.

Q Have you ever had the impression that people were working against you?

A No, sir.

Q You did not think you had enemies? A No, sir. I seemed to be liked here pretty well.

Dr. Pollock:

Q You didn't take your little child down to the river and try to kill it?

A No, sir. I think a lot of my little babies and they do me.

Dr. Prenatt:

Q Didn't you tell me that your father didn't have very good health? A Yes.

Q Have you and the other children been helping him? A I didn't but my brother-in-law was supporting him.

Q What caused you to have the idea that the state was wanting your job? A I worked for the state but I don't think they wanted it.

Dr. Milligan:

Q Are you sleeping pretty well here? A Yes, I have a nice quiet room.

Q Are you writing to the folks at home? A Yes, and I am doing all I can to help myself and Mr. Milligan.

Q That will be all this morning, thank you very much, and I am glad to see you getting along so nicely? A Good-by.

Based on this session, it is evident that John was confused and wondered why he was still being kept in the hospital. During this interview, Dr. Pollack, M.D. asked a stabbing question about whether John took his small child to the river and tried to kill it.

John politely answers, “No, sir. I think a lot of my little babies and they do me.”

Then Dr. Prenatt starts out asking about John’s father’s health and quickly changes the subject about what caused John to think the state wanted his job.

“I worked for the state but I don’t think they wanted it”, he replied.

Dr. Milligan ends the session politely, stopping it shortly after questioning John about his sleeping habits. John wondered how Ellen could do this to him. He was escorted back to his room with two attendants. He went to his bed and lay down. The beds were all the same in the hospital. They were all very small and had very thin mattresses on them. They were covered with a sheet, pillow and a very thin gray blanket on them. The room was cold and John felt lost and all alone.

Many insane asylums suffered money shortages during the 1930’s. At that time, “the staff-to-patient ratio suffered a tremendous imbalance, with 110 attendants caring for 1,585 patients.” There were many treatments unable to be offered to the patients, and many patients were staying much longer at the hospital because administrators didn’t want to lose the funding they were receiving from the state.¹

Ellen’s perspective was much different than John’s. Her declarations were recorded on the Application for Insanity Inquest. She reported John’s strange behavior had started three months earlier. According to her, he was out of work and began going into town to drink with his father and brothers. The drinking made him violent. She tried to accompany him but she had been sick, with child, and couldn’t. When she went with him before, she could keep him from drinking. She mentioned he had been wandering from home, irrational and talkative. She said he was afraid of others and had violent and destructive tendencies. She also said he was depressed and homicidal. Finally, she mentioned his Uncle Frank was insane and committed in Lakeland, Kentucky.

Ellen’s most compelling story involved John and how he became dangerous to her children. She stated he had taken the baby down to the river to kill it. John’s brother was out with him and took the child from him. He took the baby back into the house to Ellen.

It took a statement from a relative and three doctor’s assessments to commit someone in 1935. The mysterious doctors that interviewed John in jail were the ones used to complete the necessary paperwork to get him committed to the hospital.

¹ Madison State Hospital

Richard K. Schmitt, M.D, was first. He wrote that John's physical condition was good but mentally he had ideas of persecution and delusions of grandeur. He also added that John's condition had declined in the last six weeks.

A.M. Kirkpatrick, M.D. reported that John had fears of being injured and heard sounds that were not there. He also stated John was well balanced on some subjects but not when talking about what he heard. He documented Ellen's testimony about John thinking someone was trying to injure him and also her story that he tried to take the child to the river with the intention of killing it.

Finally, Wm. J. Norton, M.D. reported that John could not concentrate, was hallucinating, experiencing delusional thoughts and was suddenly excited and uncontrollable. He said John was **NOT** especially violent **BUT** he might do injury to others, especially his family. He also mentions Ellen's testimony stating John's paternal Grandfather and Uncle were both insane.

Many family members believed John should have never been committed. They stated that Ellen had been having an affair with Hugh Blair. They had been seen many times in the car together and at the park. This affair had been going on for six months prior to John being committed. Many people in the town were astounded that Ellen and Hugh were so bold. They lived in a very small town and word spread like impetigo on the face of a dirty child.

The family said Ellen called the police that dreadful night on March 14th and reported John was *violent* because she wanted to be with Hugh. They also stated she lied on the committal papers to get John put away so she could be free to marry Hugh. Later, Ellen did divorce John and marry him. It was said she would have sex with John in the bushes while visiting him in the hospital. Conjugal visits were not permitted back then. At this time, she was also being intimate with Hugh.

Ellen became pregnant and gave birth to a baby girl. Her name was Betty. According to Betty and the family, Hugh Blair was Betty's father. The Department of Public Welfare sent a letter on Ellen's behalf on December 13, 1937 stating that John was Betty's father. This statement was based on the information given to them by Ellen.

While John was committed to the hospital, he was allowed out for extended visits for weeks at a time and often for several months. Records show that his sister, Maude, came and took him out of the hospital on many occasions. He had a great time, especially when he could see his boys. This changed when Ellen began living with Hugh. Hugh was a very explosive man and during one of John's visits, he threatened John with a knife. John left immediately. Later, Maude sent a letter to the hospital referencing this incident. She was

telling them she was afraid to take John out because he wanted to see his boys and she was afraid Hugh might cause trouble again.

John was on his last two-month furlough with Maude on May 12, 1956. He had a stroke and was taken to St. Joseph's Infirmary in Louisville, Kentucky. He could not speak and was paralyzed on the right side of his body. He later died September 20, 1956.

The recounting of John's experience raised a lot of questions regarding his sanity. Was he insane or not? One of the first questions that can be asked is whether John received a fair trial at his commitment sentencing, if he even had one? We are still searching for the court records on this. It was obvious that many people believed he was Indian, based on his physical characteristics. He actually was of Indian descent. Was he stereotypically classified as an Indian and suffered the negative consequences because of that?

If John were violent and homicidal, why would the hospital staff have ever let him out? Sending him off for a day would be dangerous, let alone, letting him out for months at a time. Innocent people could have been hurt.

There is some evidence that John's grandfather, Joseph Nicholas, and his uncle, Frank Nicholas, were both committed to an insane asylum in Lakeland, Kentucky. After searching several insane asylums in Kentucky, neither Joseph nor Frank can be found on the patient records. Also, no commitment hearings can be found for either. Did John inherit his insanity, or was he a victim of presumptive inherited insanity? It is a fact that some of John's male descendants have had mental issues over the years. They have suffered from depression, bi-polar and schizophrenia. Could this inherited gene have been passed down from John, which proves he was insane?

The only witness account for the committal papers was Ellen. It was evident she was not truthful on many subjects. She was committing adultery and lying about the father of her daughter, Betty. Based on the visitation reports from Madison, Ellen's last visit to John was May 26, 1936. Betty was born December 10, 1937. He could not have been her father. Could this have been another lie by Ellen to get Betty medical help at the time or was John really her father and the visitation records were in error because of the lack of staff during that time period? In John's obituary, there is no mention of a daughter.

NICHOLAS, Mr. John, died at 116, Thursday, September 1956, in his 51st year, at St. Joseph Infirmary; residence, Madison, Ind. Beloved father of Mr. Allen and Gerald Nicholas; brother of Mrs. Pearl Henning, Mrs. John R. [unclear], Mrs. M. B. Lewis, Butler, Ind. and Arvil Nicholas; also survived by one grandchild, Mr. Nicholas is at the O. D. White Funeral Home, 2227 S. 2d, where services will be held Saturday afternoon at 2 o'clock. Interment in St. Stephen Cemetery.



There is also strong evidence that Ellen was the physical aggressor, not John. My mother, Darlene Nicholas, witnessed John's demeanor on occasion and stated, "He was a quiet, mild-mannered man and wouldn't hurt a fly." His physical size also leaves the question of how could he have hurt anyone?

Finally, why didn't they get John's side of the story when he was first admitted? Was it in their best interest to not talk to John, or again, was this an issue because of the lack of staffing? Did they keep him locked away for 22 years to keep the state funding flowing?

John's unfortunate mark on this world was exhibited on his patient record at Southeastern Indiana Hospital. It was stamped with **DEAD** on the upper left corner. The hospital where John was kept is now called Madison State Hospital. It is still in operation today being managed under many different principles than those used during the time period he was kept there.

That is how his life ended; very sad with many unanswered questions that still haunt his family today. I am one of those still seeking answers about the grandfather I never met. Was he insane, was he put away because he was categorized as a crazy Indian, or was he put away by some elaborate scheme by our grandmother so she could be with another man?

You can be the judge and jury and arrive at your own conclusions regarding these very interesting questions.

AUTHOR OF THE MOMENT, CAN YOU TELL ME, DO I END UP HAPPY? A FAIRY-TALE

BY TYLER WHITE

The Wind was a poet, and a reckless one at that. Each day at daylight he proceeded to rhyme and theorize until his own heart could stand it no longer. Despite this dangerous habit, all who came to know him admired him for his skill (for it was a gift), and held him in high regard. Showing no ill-will to any creature, The Reckless Wind would compose sonnets for the bumblebees as they went about their work. Dancing about on his heels, he would sing epics to the trees as they swayed in his rhythmic steps. Welcoming the afternoon as a dear friend, and sending the evening off with a fond farewell, there was no want for companionship in his melodic life.

Yet, the composer was lonely, for he was in love, and as all lovers are at some point, he felt a longing for that which he could not obtain. Though he recklessly scored the world around him with an endless cadence, always the Reckless Wind would save his sweetest rhymes for the Pure Moon. Every night at twilight, she would rise to cast her lovely beams upon his face as he would whisper his cleverest limericks in her ear. Though they spent each night in blissful companionship, as all good things do, their time together would often come to an end far too swift; the moon's brother, the Jealous Sun, would rise driving the wind back to his wandering and forcing the two lovers apart. Despondent, the Reckless Wind would travel many miles, the face of his beloved ever dancing before his eyes, and always he pondered how he might end such conflict.

This rash cycle of joy and despair continued for many years, interminably and without any direct confrontation until one fateful night which changed the poor poet's life forever. As the Reckless Wind coasted down the soft sand in a place near the sea, the night was swiftly approaching. As any lover can attest to, the wind was anxious beyond belief, expecting the appearance of his beloved. Though not an entirely unpleasant feeling, one can certainly never call such a feeling one of comfort. It feels much the same as one feels before rising to address a very large crowd, or when shaking hands with some very prominent person, or perhaps how one might even feel when speaking to one's grandfather, though these be poor comparisons. The heart leaps in the chest with such ferocity, bursting at its seams, and crying out for relief from the pressure of anxious anticipation. Yet at the same time, one feels such a sense of inadequacy to address the coming circumstance that intelligible speech, much less conscious thought becomes nigh-impossible. The entire world suddenly becomes a rounded endeavor in which all ideas and objects begin to flow together in one seamless dream in which the slightest of discomforts and irritations have no place. Upon the singular person of the admirer's sweetheart does the whole of this universe proceed to revolve in a continuous quantum. Such was the feeling and atmosphere of the Reckless Wind as he prepared for the coming of his lover.

However, when the evening finally arrived, cooling the earth after the heat of the day, the wind remained waiting through the entirety of the night. Patiently he waited for the Pure Moon, for he was in love and faithful as no lover has ever been, nor as any since

will ever be. Softly he crooned to the waves, reciting his favorite rhymes just to pass the time...

“Just listen to the voice in my head
He’s telling me that you’re the common thread.
The questions I ask, trailing behind
They over take me as I unwind.

As we avoid the truth, and our right minds
The planet turns and the stars align
You ask me how I am and I reply.
A constellation forms between you and I...”

Constantly, the Reckless Wind questioned her eclipse, but never once doubted her resolve. Patiently he waited as the stars danced above, sweeping across the vaulted sky in their tribal rituals. As morning approached, the Reckless Wind had, by this time, become very anxious in his wonder and confusion. It was as the dancing troupe made their final departure from the heavens, and the jealous sun began to awake, that the reckless poet caught the smallest of the stars so as to inquire as to the source of his dilemma.

“Please, little one. In your many travels this evening, have you seen my lover? She is delicate, with eyes as deep as the summer. In the sky she glides upon God’s precipice. Her mantle is pale, and her presence of gentleness, but she has not met me here this night passing from my sight. Though I know her love is pure, her disappearance is highly irregular! Inspire of all your sanctions, could you shed some light on my passions?”

The Young Starlet Child replied to his calling with wide eyes and voice forlorn. Her words brought no comfort to the anxious lover, for her attention was focused upon higher causes than that of the reckless poet.

“If for purity you do seek, listen my son as I do speak. The sky stretches far, and the sky stays so near, some lovers stray, while others stand here. Wish not for the day to end, but search yourself for your dear friend. Through both the concrete and the abstract, find in yourself the strength to act. Inquire yourself of the Jealous Sun, not ‘till reconciled will your task be done.”

In virtue was the Young Starlet Child contrived, and to virtue she looked, and nothing else. No cause separate of Utopia would enthrall such a hythloday to action.

Dejected and drastic, The reckless poet was taken aback, suddenly uncertain of many things which he once understood, most of all in regards as to the whereabouts of his lover, he was desperately unsure. Despite this ambivalence, the Reckless Wind quickly began to theorize as to both cause and solution, and no matter which way he chose to describe his circumstance, all roads led to him, indeed taking the Young Starlet Child’s advice and inquiring as to the disappearance of his paramour; Inquiring of the Jealous Sun, himself.

And so, gathering every ounce of courage inhabiting the corners of his virtuous heart, The Reckless Wind approached the Jealous Sun at the break of day. To such sincerity and ardent devotion, even the most voracious of souls could not object to such a simple inquisition. The master of sky sat on his throne wearing a countenance numb, expressionless and still; yet when the composer of air approached he showed no fear.

“My bright comrade, you know why I have come. Seeking that which was not, for my love is lost beyond my thought. Tell me now where she has gone, flying by night, as the sky stretches on. By grace and grave, the shipwrecked and smuggler, I know that it be not for sake of another. Save for your command given from atop your seat so grand.”

Grave was the Jealous Sun’s expression as he listened to the Reckless Wind’s questions, and silent were his eyes. Yet patient was he, and calculating were his thoughts. Swift was his reply and curt was his speech, when the Jealous Sun finally spoke.

“You’re earnest I can see, but your stories I still don’t believe. You amongst these souls, lack any form of control. My sister I have hidden away, eclipsed until I decide a day, when she might again rest in your arms, truly beloved and safe from all harm. Prove to me your words and thoughts for you have naught but youth, your foreign state of confusion is no longer safe, for your home is now in pursuit. Send for the light that lives in the north, she can cleanse you thenceforth. Your time grows short and so take heed, take the road less traveled by lovers indeed. Patience is key and separation is certain, through danger you must pass and then you will learn...”

It was with these words that the Jealous Sun remained resolute in his purpose and sent the Reckless Wind away with few more answers than he had arrived with.

Distraught, the Reckless Wind continued to wander, what had the Jealous Sun meant in his admonition? Such a duty fell ambiguous upon the poet’s ears. Cryptic was the path set before him, and fractured the road, yet in search of his love, he ploughed north with tears in his eyes, and questions in his heart. Over rock and ridge his swift steps took him, constantly in search of the light which would satisfy his charge and return his amore. Within the evergreen forests and across mighty rivers, beyond amber plains, and through driving rain the Reckless Wind traveled until he came to the very foot of the mountains. It was here that he collapsed, cold and tired amongst the rolling foothills, still sweeping onwards.

When the Reckless Wind came to his senses, he found himself flowing down over the mountains passing through the trees, caressing each leaf as he sped by. He breathed the sweet valley morning and tasted the velveteen sky, leaving no scent untouched. Despite the ache in his heart, the poet found his soul beginning to soar amidst the beautiful landscape which now surrounded him. His core was moved so much that he burst into a joyful song, filling the air with his whimsy...

“If I knew how to fly away from here,
Where stories are heard all the time,
And dreams are fished from deep sea brine,
I’d be there to stay.

The air would be filled with life at night,
No one could help but to sing,
While they placed their songs on wing,
Cuz they’re reminded of better days.”

With a song on his lips and light in his murky eyes, he continued to travel the airwaves like an angel of interest, casting a gentle breeze across the blades of grass which swayed in time with his rhythms. A flock of sparrows drifted by his side and began to harmonize with his composition. Meanwhile a cardinal led the melody, dancing amongst the measures and leading each bar with his melodious solo. Such were the Reckless Wind’s companions as he continued northward. However, as the miles increased and the days of his travel began to blend together, the ground below his footsteps became colder, and the atmosphere sparse. Shorter were the daylight hours now, and bare was the landscape which met the Reckless Wind’s smoky vision, Soon all the world was bathed in a silver shimmer, as snow covered mountains began to rise higher on each side of the Reckless Wind’s path. Crystal glaciers pervaded the horizon on every side, where the sky, capacious in its expanse and reaching to the very corners of this life. Clear it was, and dark. So dark was the sky such that as the wind looked upon it he could taste the very tip of its immense girth. Amidst the expanse, islands of diamond gleamed, floating on frozen seas of glass. Softly would the wind coast about their aerial pinnacles, caressing each icy shaft with winter’s care. Like a mother gazes upon a beloved child’s face, would the Reckless Wind gaze upon such wonders, for each was his kin. “Certainly this must be the North; it’s all I’ve ever hoped for! No more could a breeze wish for such things. Truly is this the home of kings! Here I may find the northern lights as they dance amongst the heights. Here will my hope be restored to me. Now will be decided all that would ever be!” And find the northern lights he did indeed. Not but after a day of living amongst the frost did the Reckless wind find that which he sought. As twilight drew nigh, and the sky raged clear, the wind sat down to rest upon the water. Tenderly did he bathe his smooth fingers amongst the chilly ocean’s vast folds rustling the water’s surface. It was then that he cast his eyes to the sky with longing, and he met with a sight such as that he had never seen before.

Blazing across the sky like a silvery estuary flowing down from her source near heaven’s embankment, an argent stream of light coursed across the deepening vault. Looping amidst her empyrean beacons were deep shades of azure and viridian, outlined in the deepest of crimson. Sterling starlets were cast throughout her aqueous figure, drifting about as schooners on a pale sea. Each possessed a wispy green sail, traversed by wafts of royal rills. An amber mist left over from the summer morning surrounded the celestial vapors. Swaying to and fro, the golden haze reminded the Reckless Wind of dawn in late August, calling to mind the sounds of rippling rivers, and crying herons as they hunted in the underbrush. Music filled the air congregating upon the loam, ever swelling and changing about the poet. One moment the sound of a thousand violins could be heard

echoing about the canyons, the next sounding a chorus of bull-frogs taking their midsummer solstice. Hastily did the Great Lights move across their domain, casting such a feeling of abundant paucity upon the Reckless Wind that he could do no more than stand in awe of the great scene before him. Such was the ethereal allure of the Aurora Borealis, or has it been since said.

Never before had the Reckless Wind seen anything of the sort, and as he gazed upon her magnificent brilliance before him, his heart leapt and his soul began to soar for he had found what which he sought!

“Jubilation free! Could this be that which I seek? The Northern Lights are before my eyes, and I shall see my love'er the Jealous Sun rise.”

Yet his joyous elations were suddenly cut short and all music ceased. As he gazed on in wonder and hopeful adoration, he began to take notice of that which had previously passed him by. Unbeknown to the composer of air, ominous storm clouds had begun to gather on each side of the horizon, bringing with them the chilling rain of the North and stinging ice. In the face of such dangers, the tall mountains quaked in their roots as the sable rivers hid their delicate faces. Even the Great Light quailed in her path across the heavens. Violently did the rain and Ice berate the Great Light as she progressed, grasping at her sides and tearing her flesh. Quickly the very beauty which once ruled the sky became scattered about the endless void. Urgently she glanced about the earth for one who might deliver her from the storm's onslaught. It was then that she noticed the Reckless Wind.

“Help me child! Save me from this dangerous gale! I may seem grand and beyond reach but my life is frail! Find it within yourself to rescue me, and I will be in your debt, though I am weak. You cannot sit idly by, nor remain there and question why.”

Confused, the Reckless Wind watched the Great Light under attack by the weather so strong; and confused, he searched for an action he might take. Never before had such fear grasped him, and never again would he be called upon to meet such a calling. Though he did not himself know it, the defining moment of his entire life was upon him, and his time was growing short. So it was, as the Reckless Wind closed his begrimed eyes, that he began to swell about in a stronger gale than he ever had before. Swifter now were his rhythmic steps and stronger was his melody. Grim became his demeanor and turbulent were his blasts. Surging high above the ground where once a young zephyr stood, now a mighty tempest raged.

Whistling past sea and sound, the Reckless Wind rose in the air to meet the oncoming storm. As the two monstrosities approached each other, the air tingled with potency and the very sky began quiver. As The Reckless Wind faced the coming invasion, the vast heavens themselves folded aside in his path. It was with a clap of lightning that the two powers collided in the sky, each raging in order to gain some ground. For hours on end the two were locked into an endless struggle neither willing to give way to the other. Just as the Reckless Wind would push forward, the coming storm would sweep in underneath his feet, bursting the glaciers lying beneath. Around their struggling forms whirled streams of

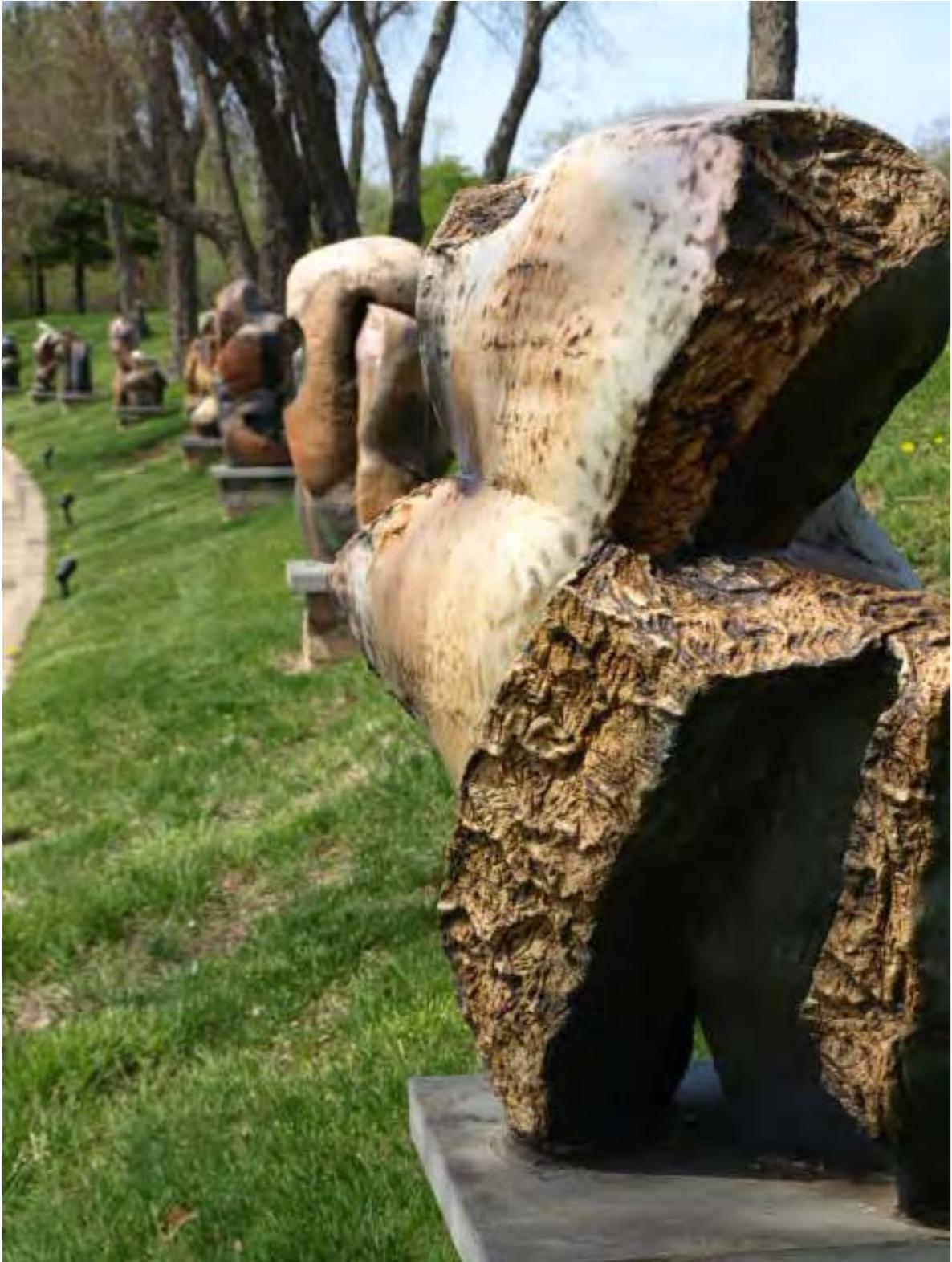
ice and water caught up and tossed about in their efforts. All the while, the Great Light looked on, growing in admiration and esteem. Constant was each in their resolution, and powerful were their wills, yet so strong was the storm that even Father Time himself would have been irresolute as to the outcome, Yet as the wise so often say, it is truly he with the greater cause who triumphs in the end, and what did the Wind have to lose but true love? As he struggled, always was the face of the Pure Moon before the poet's eyes, all about his station could he feel her lovely beams cast about his frame, and he was filled with strength. Every second his sight became clearer, his efforts grew cogent, and his will thrived. With one final burst of summer's breath, the Reckless Wind silenced winter in its calloused raging and sent it farther north to those places where none have yet ventured.

His duty fulfilled and the danger abated, the Reckless Wind returned to the ground, exhausted. All about him rang the applause of all creation. Tall mountains creaked in admiration, while the sable waters below leaped in excitement, even the Great Light herself could not help but shine the brighter because of his victory.

As he gasped for breath, the Reckless Wind dimly saw before him the Great Light as she descended, bathing him in sharp colors and cradling his weary head in her rays. Softly she spoke to him words of wisdom and insight.

"You have traveled in search of the unknown, that deep history. You left your home seeking beyond your plateau, all love's mysteries. It is love you shall have at the end of this day, inside every thought through hell should bar your path in every way, you've found what you sought. It's not enough, just to abstain, though it costs your freedom, to see others free. Till Christ returns, as I remain, Lord, let not chivalry die with thee, for your time has come now, my dearest friend, though neither you nor your breeze can be an island..." With such words, the Great Lights comforted him and carried him home, far to the south where his true heart would forever dwell amongst the trees.

And the rest, as they so often say, is history. Though as vibrant as ever, the Reckless Wind was now not so reckless. Again would the Tranquil Wind dance among the woodlands, and sing to the bees as they gathered their stores... His poetry ever unfolding before him still is showing no creature any ill-will. Welcoming the afternoon as a dear friend, and sending the evening off with a fond farewell, there was no want for companionship in his melodic life. Again would he speak to the starlet children, guiding them with council sweet, and many times would visit the Great Lights of the North. Again would he approach the Jealous Sun with honor in his eyes, and integrity clothing his name, and again did he see his love. Never did she again leave him, for always do fidelity, passion, ardor and devotion have their accolade. Always the Tranquil Wind would save his sweetest rhymes for the Pure Moon. Every night at twilight, she would rise to cast her lovely beams upon his face as he would whisper his cleverest limericks in her ear. It was then that the poet would spend each night in paradisiacal esprit, married to the Pure Moon. May such love forever flourish.



Photography by S.G. Traylor 2011 - Robert Pulley's, *Ancestral Way*

RUN AWAY BY CHRIS SIMS

We've never been able to get it through our heads that some things aren't ours to control. We look across oceans, voids, and expanses and see something we don't like and think, "Let's do something to stop it". Or we see something we want and make up excuses to get it. Government tosses and writhes over internal conflict, on whether or not to invade another place based on tentatives and ideology. Lies, rhetoric, commandeered truths, and vague goals often fight reasonable alternatives to outright warfare. The argumentation between war and peace typically comes to a dooming conclusion: a police action. At home, we just assume that a soldier in powered armor with electronic weaponry is more than enough to stop a group of bandanna-wearing savages armed with projectile based guns. The death toll rises anyway, and continues to confound the accountants at the water cooler, the blue hairs at the salon, the kids in art class, and the hosts on television. What we've lost through our zealous technocracy, the enemy has gained through disadvantage; cunning. To be honest though, none of this is about the ignorant masses we swore to protect, it's about us; it's about the guys and gals off in some alien world, fighting, eating, sleeping, marching, shooting, dressing, killing, dying, and saluting for a military mission that lacks finesse, rationality, and objectivity. No good comes from this farce. We lose soldiers defending deliveries and departures of corporate goods, all in the name of our country and our military. More or less, we're guns without hire.

The stories that come home with us are generally not good. We have the good stories about home circulating when we're over there to make us forget, and the bad stories at home so we never forget what we tried to blot out when we were over there. The tales of chivalry died with the ancient world; only the fools brandish what happens here. Every now and then though, some things happen that are just good enough not to be bad. We might hear these stories in the mess hall or in the showers; they cut through the distracting chatter about home and echo in our ears as we listen. Each of those stories, about the positive things we do over here, are just enough...to fill us with a little hope...a little faith in what we're doing...

I was on recon duty in Sector Oscar. The Freet, a terrorist organization, was reported in the area, and I was sent to investigate. The brass hardly ever sent out recon; they typically just rolled a convoy in and came back with wounded and prisoners. As a ranger, I didn't like staying at the base all the time; there's too much complaining there, so it was nice to get out. I also wanted to find the enemy camp, it was my duty...and I had personal reasons.

I was seeing a local girl named Jega. She was good looking, and didn't mind putting me up for the night when I was on R&R. Jega was just a girl; even though she had a small boy with gray hair (which is supposedly atypical for a child) and blue eyes and had already gone through two husbands (one dead, one ran away), she was full of questions. When we would lie in bed at night, she would ask me about the stars. I couldn't tell her which one I was from, because I honestly didn't know from that vantage point, but I was able to tell her about what it was like out there. She would stare wide-eyed at the expanses of space from

that stone balcony we were on and fall asleep next to me dreaming of a world better than hers. I didn't want to burst her bubble, but I'd been to other planets, and there is rarely room for utopia.

I never got to know her boy all that much; he was often out with the village nanny or something like that with the other children while the adults worked. I would give him stuff from the base every now and then, like comic books (even though he could not read), and drafting pencils. I guess he liked me, but that's what Jeqa told me.

A company called Oxide got a "permit" from the military permitting them to drill in certain areas for Aminium, a kind of refractive metal used for solar arrays. Of course, the military granted them protection. Jeqa's town, Luind was patrolled by a fairly large military presence which kept the Freots out. When Oxide came, most of the soldiers left, and it was only a matter of time.

My combat unit got a distress call from Luind. There was still a small military presence there, which might have been enough to hold off the Freots if the commanding officer didn't lose his shit during the battle. We could hear him on the radio frantically shouting that his unit was being destroyed instead of leading them. By the time we got there (after Oxide shut down for the day), the town was burned and trampled. We scouted the town and only found a few gnarled survivors. Jeqa was dead; she was sprawled naked and beheaded on her bed. Her discarded head lay in the corner like a forgotten and punctured basketball; I covered her shocked face with a towel. Jeqa's kid was nowhere to be found. The commanding officer, the only military individual who survived the destruction, was found whimpering in a cabinet. When I inquired what happened, he couldn't answer; he was totally in another place. Ever since, I had little tolerance for the kinds of responses that commanding officer had...I suppose it might be unfair, but I honestly believe that if he didn't fall apart during the siege, Jeqa would still be alive.

After Luind I began to hate our orders and our rationale. Our distant leaders told us at the base we were there to stop the Freots in order to, "spread peace, civility, and our productive way of life." Meanwhile, companies like Oxide had seen skyrocketing stocks and sales, and the terrorist threat here had practically remained unchanged since we arrived. I got sick of the fucking politics, so took a demotion and became a ranger.

Sector Oscar wasn't especially known to be dangerous. Most of it was hilly forest and the occasional treeless valley. My third night out there, I set up a discreet camp of a bedroll and a ceramic heater. Rather than eat the issued stuff, I waited in the trees until a hapless animal wondered over to investigate the scent on my bedroll. I'd just drop onto it and stab it a couple of times until it dropped. I'd take some of the meat and toss the rest of the carcass to the gleaming yellow eyes watching in the distance. Sleep would have been great that night if I wasn't disturbed by distant voices. It was light enough out that I could see, but I didn't know where they were. I jumped up and tried to free my gauss rifle from my pack, but it was stuck on something, so I had to leave it. I quietly slipped away as the voices converged behind me. I watched from a tree as they pried through my things and took every bit of it; even the bones from the animal I ate the night before. They left and I

climbed down. All I had left was a combat knife and my hydration pills. I kept going regardless. Later, I came to a small clearing, which I avoided. Unfortunately, someone else happened to be thinking the same way. Before I knew it, a rifle was jutting me in the back and I was a Freet prisoner.

There was another guy there with me as we were walking through a large valley. He was dressed as a soldier. We both walked in front of the Freet with our arms up. Every now and then we would exchange glances. Eventually, he spoke. "A ranger, huh? I thought you guys didn't get captured." I rolled my eyes. "What'd you do?" I asked, "Let go of your CO's hand and wander off?" He chuckled, "Pretty much." There was a pause and then he inquired, "Where are you stationed?" I briskly answered, "Ceres." He then replied, "Oh? Me too." I glanced at him and said, "I haven't seen you there before." "It's a big base", he answered. He turned slightly and asked, "Got a name? "What's it matter?" I groaned. "Echoyo! Maein dey eichioun!", the Freet yelled. I didn't speak the native tongue at all, but the soldier whispered, "He wants us to be quiet or he'll shoot us. My name is Deke, by the way." The Freet yelled again, "Morin!" The bastard then struck me in the back of the head with his gun. I fell, but collected myself as the gun was jutting into my back. For a brief instant, I felt a surge of anger in my stomach and the urge to pull the knife from my boot and just take a chance at slashing that fucking Freet's neck; it wouldn't have worked, though.

We walked a long time until we came to a town. The whole place was just like Luind. Disemboweled, beheaded, minced, and grisly bodies that looked more like offal than people were strewn about smoldering houses. No children. There were several other men at the end of the road, and a woman. We reached them, and three of the five men were clearly Freet. The other two men were civilians, both tied and blindfolded. The woman was bound only by her hands. She was crying. We stopped about ten feet away with the Freet still behind us. One of the other Freet pushed the civilians to their knees as another pulled a pistol from a holster. Both of the civilian men began to speak in low voices, almost like praying. The woman began to sob loudly. With a loud crack and a scream from the woman, both men fell to the ground. The Freet holstered the pistol and the woman grew quiet with shock. The other Freet walked over to us and two patted us down. They took out my knife. The Freet with the pistol looked onward and smiled out of the corner of his mouth.

"Malkhu netaius sul. Luyij dey spui." Deke whispered in a shaky voice, "He says we should be impressed by what they have done."

I wasn't that impressed... more like appalled. Anyone with a good set of guns can level a town, burn and rape everyone in it, indoctrinate stolen children, and gloat about it afterward. "I wish I could tell him he's an ass." I said.

The Freet with the pistol grunted gutturally; I think it was supposed to be a laugh. Regardless, he said, "Human, I am no fool. I have worked long to discover the secrets of your army. I've found ways to sneak between your patrols and slaughter them like pigs in

their sleep. I've mastered tracking lone soldiers like you and kidnapping them like hapless children. You think your technology will save you from our cunning. You are wrong, Human." There was a pause. The wind blew modestly as the smoldering town crackled and popped, and the woman whimpered softly.

I looked around and said, "So...is all of this a sport for you?"

The Freet smiled, his scarred face twisting into a sort of condescending scowl. "The young ones like to think so. But we serve a higher purpose. We don't value physical pleasures and objects as you do, decadent swine. Order will be brought through the cleansing of this planet...much like your phoenix; we will rise from your ashes and build a great and holy empire atop your corpses."

I thought about this for a moment. Then I responded, "I just see another sanctimonious fuck hijacking a belief system to gain power. You don't value physical pleasures, so I guess that girl is for the gardening, huh?"

The Freet's scowl twisted into a jagged parabola, his patchy goatee scrunching. "I will throw you into the gates of magma. You will burn while shouting my name, Gragah." He growled and stared down his nose at me. Deke shrank back slightly and made an uneasy sound. A truck came soon after and we were loaded into the back.

We arrived at a bunker a short time later. The entrance was a tight dark tunnel that we were shoved down by bayonets. The inside was dimly lit by torches and it smelled of blood and sweat. Gragah emerged before us.

"You see how foolish you are, human? You came to find this base, well here you are." I looked past him and saw a great metal chamber, lined with bulbs, tunnels and doorways.

Gragah extended his hand toward the chamber. "We constructed all of this right beneath your noses. You are blind, human; in more ways than one."

We were ushered into the chamber. Deke and I squinted as the lights grew brighter. There were Freet's everywhere, chanting at us from the rafters above and the metal balconies below. I managed to look over the railing to look down; I could barely see the bottom of the chamber. Deke, sweating beads, said, "We're going to die in here." "Shut up.", I said.

"What are we going to do? They're going to kill us..."

"Shut your damn mouth."

"I don't want to die...please..." Deke really pissed me off with his whining. He sounded like a new recruit...for all I knew at the time, he could have been one, but it didn't keep me from turning around and slugging him in the face.

“Stop your damn whining!” I yelled.

Gragah laughed, filling the chamber with his booming and raspy voice. “See? You are all cowards. No resolve. You are not warriors!”

We were promptly shoved into a tunnel and into cells while the woman was ushered on. Suddenly, she burst out and struck one of the Freots, sending him over the railing, clanging all the way down to the bottom of the tall tunnel. The Freots grabbed her and dragged her screaming down the tunnels. I could hear Deke sobbing in the other cell, so I paced like a tiger in a zoo.

We were in the cells for a long while, probably three or four hours. Deke kept whimpering in the other room. I had a chance to really think about what was going on. We were going to die.

“Deke”, I said. There was no answer. “I’m...sorry I punched you.” There was still no response. “I couldn’t help it.” I continued. “But we can’t survive if we don’t keep ourselves from falling apart.” I felt like my words were falling on deaf ears. There was movement coming from down the hall. “Look”, I said. “I...won’t let you die, okay. I’ll get you out of here.” The guards came back and opened the cells.

We were being escorted down the tunnels when Deke started to cry. “I don’t want to die...” My muscles tightened. I kept wondering how he got into the military. Then I couldn’t take it anymore. I flung my arms up and planted my fist on a guard’s nose. I heard it crack and then they were on me. The Freots kicked and struck me with their guns for a solid minute. Three of them dragged me off and the other pulled Deke along. I blacked out.

When I came to we were in a large room. The three guards still had a firm grip on me and I could still hear Deke. In the center of the room was a lava pool. I pieced together what Gragah said earlier. There was a man hanging naked above the searing pool by his arms.

Gragah spoke, “Now, human, you will see what becomes of our enemies, as well as our traitors!”

Gragah turned to the man hanging above the lava. “Now you will die, traitor! If you yell my name loud enough and beg for forgiveness...” He pulled out his pistol. “I will end your misery prematurely...” Gragah pulled a lever on a panel. The man began to lower.

The Freet leader looked at me over his shoulder with a smirk and stepped aside. The man writhed as his feet entered the hissing pool. The man screeched like a rhesus monkey in a laboratory; it was unreal, as if his vocal cords would snap. Witnessing the torture made me truly realize the follies of war...hijacked truths, lies, and then the horrors that lurked within those tunnels all came together to form a terrible fabrication. I watched this man burn from the bottom up. They burned their own kind for the sake of jealousy just as we let Lunid burn for the sake of a company. They lied to their own just as we lied to our

own...but we all die for the same things, lies, power struggles, ideology, and material wealth.

Suddenly, the man stopped lowering. Gragah looked over and the console and motioned to the guards. Two of the guards that were next to me went to the panel and mumbled unintelligibly. The other guard stepped up next to me and grabbed my collar. I looked up at the man hanging by his wrists. His legs were dark red and almost gone and his head hung down between his limp shoulders. Gragah looked on at the man with a lecherous smile. Deke whimpered slightly behind me. The pain from the beatings I took earlier was all but gone. Adrenaline blurred my vision as my teeth clenched as something inside began to grow like a gas fire. I had one shot to end the madness.

I brought my arm up and shoved the guard next to me before he could raise his gun to my head. The Freet stumbled into the other two, pushing them into the panel, breaking it, and all three fell into the lava with a searing burst of steam. Gragah turned quickly, but I charged him like a starving shark hunting a fat seal. We struggled, and I knocked the pistol from his hand and he forced the fight to the ground. The whole time, he glared at me through his bloodshot brown eyes. We rolled close to the ledge of the sun-like lava. The heat made the hair on my head curl and smoke. I freed my arm and placed it across his throat. His arms quickly flung up to mine and soon, he was too weak to keep me from shoving him headfirst into the pool. He came up briefly, and gurgled as streams of bright yellow liquid burned into his face before he sank back down. I was alone in the room. There was no sign of Deke or his guard. I looked back up at the man. He partially raised his head and moaned. I picked up the pistol and shot him in the head.

My act of mercy attracted two Freet guards, who ran into the room as I hid behind a pillar. I shot them both and took a rifle and a knife. I ran through the tunnels quietly, avoiding Freet and shooting only when I had to. I happened to pass a room, and inside I saw the woman from earlier. A Freet was trying to pull her clothes off. I came up behind him and stabbed him in the heart. The woman stared at me for a moment before I took her hand and ran back into the halls.

There was an explosion from within the tunnels; just another reason for escape as far as I was concerned. Alarms began to sound. The woman and I hid while guards ran past us shouting. My thoughts turned to Deke, the whimpering soldier. I had no idea where he was, but I owed it to him to get him out. We made our way through the tunnels back the other way. There were gunshots in the direction we were heading. The walls shook and the corridors began to lean. Then three guards came running around a corner. They saw me and raised their rifles. I dove to the side and the woman dropped to the floor. They opened fire, hitting my left arm. I managed to shoot one before a jolting explosion knocked a rafter onto the other two, crushing them against the floor. I slowly got up and went to the woman, but that's when I saw him. Deke was standing in an adjacent hallway.

"Deke!" I yelled. He turned his head and saw me. "Come on!" I shouted as I motioned. Deke just stood there looking at me with a blank face as another explosion from above sent

debris tumbling into his hallway. I stood there frozen for a moment, but then the woman sprinted down the hallway toward the exit. I was right behind her.

The woman and I made a B-line for the exit. I was running low on ammunition for the rifle, but I shot every Freet I had to on the way out. We found the exit and made it into a clearing about a mile away. The woman fell to the ground, and I heard... as well as felt a massive boom. The trees in the distance fell over and black smoke billowed into the early morning air.

We walked after that. Somehow, I had survived the predicament. In the space of a day, I had been captured by the enemy, witnessed the carnage of terrorism, and had been shown the cruelty of torture. Before the incident, I always took it for granted that experiencing something like that and seeing what I saw would let me have the answers I needed to come to a conclusion about the messes we seem to cause everywhere. I was wrong; I couldn't find any answers to why things happened the way they did, but even if I was able to, no epiphany was worth so many lives.

The woman had said nothing the entire time; she just walked along with her head down. I stopped and looked at her inquisitively. She lunged at me without even looking up. I wasn't prepared and landed on my arm and everything went white long enough for her to grab my rifle and point it at me. There was a motionless pause as we sat there transfixed on each other. All I could notice was her eyes, steely from war and sunken from fatigue.

She spoke, "This...all your fault..." I laid there propped up on my good arm. She continued, "You...promised to protect our town...army stayed only as long as metal came out of the ground. Now my husband...is dead." She said as she began to choke. "Your army provoked them...made them hate us...for welcoming you...we trusted you..." Tears bubbled in her gray eyes. I then spoke, not knowing what else to say. "I...had a friend in the town of Luind...Jeqa...who was betrayed. I think...I know how you feel." The woman's eyes widened and she lowered the gun slightly.

For a moment, I felt a sense of understanding, that kind of satisfaction you get when someone truly understands what you're feeling. She opened her mouth to say something. I heard a zip and saw blood leak from newly formed burns in her neck. She fell over, her eyes wide open. Until that time, I'd never actually had a good look at her face. She looked so much like Jeqa she could have been her sister for all I knew. A group of camouflaged soldiers approached from the side of the field. Comrades. Even as they radioed for a helicopter to come and get me, I stared at the woman, but my eyes were heavy, and I had been exposed to so much. No matter how much I stared or thought about Jeqa, Luind, her boy, the two men who died, Deke, the Freet traitor, or the dead woman in front of me, no tears came, no sickness welled up inside of me, and no rage billowed in my chest. I didn't feel human.

Back at Ceres Base, I was treated for my bullet wound and laid in the infirmary for a week. I was cleared to leave the planet and return home shortly after I was released from the infirmary. The gunshot caused tendon damage in my arm and made me useless to the

army. Home seemed so far away, and I couldn't get my mind off of anything that had happened, or the fact I felt numb to it all. There was guilt, but I wasn't sure where it came from.

Those last few nights at the base was full of nightmares. I kept reliving Gragah's torture chamber, the gnarled corpses in the town, Deke's face before the ceiling collapsed, and the woman's last few moments alive before my comrades mistakenly took her for an enemy. It was enough to keep me from sleeping on my last night there. I became scared; I was terrified that the dreams would dominate my life, and I would never actually return home in every sense of the word. I slipped into the armory and grabbed an incendiary grenade. I passed some guards who just waved me on and I slid between the clingy canvas tents and buildings to the cesspool and stood next to it. Rampant fear of reliving another second of the incident collided with itself in my head as I placed my trembling hand on the pin.

"And you thought I was a coward", a voice said. I turned and saw him.

"Deke?!" I said. He nodded his head. I stood there dumbfounded. "You didn't die? How?" I asked.

He smirked, and said, "I feel like I owe it to you to explain what happened. Since you're technically an active military officer until tomorrow at 0800, you're sworn to secrecy for what you're about to hear. It's a secret matter, you see." I waited for him to continue. "I'm a Mercenary Operative. My job was to infiltrate the Freet base and destroy it, you just happened to get caught up in the situation."

"You're not a soldier?" I asked. "No", he said. "So everything you did...was a show?" I inquired.

"I had to feel you out", he said. "I had to find out what made you tick so you could make a distraction for me to get what I was after. You definitely made the job easier being such an angry guy, and so did the Freet leader for making you even angrier." I walked up to him.

"You could have killed that Freet at the beginning and set me free! Why did you use me?" I asked.

"I had to. I ran into some trouble and fled to the town of Kerte to use as cover; the Freet trashed the whole place looking for me, but I escaped into the woods where I was captured, but fortunately you came along before I was marched back to the town. You were the right kind of guy to steal attention away from me." I didn't know what to think and this point, but the resounding sentiment was anger.

"You...used the town as 'cover'?" I asked.

"I couldn't fail the mission; I have a reputation to uphold." He said as he turned. "I know it sounds cruel, but it is just business, and besides, the Freet are gone now; they

won't be interfering in on Oxide's operations anymore. Also, the people can live in peace now, as long as they don't interfere with the corporations, but if they do, they know where to find me. Now if you'll excuse me, I have to leave at 0240; the governmental situation on Aygyn is getting tense, and I have a few assassinations to carry out."

Deke left, if that was his real name, leaving me standing there with the grenade in hand, which I wanted to shove down his throat. I tossed the grenade in the pool; it plopped in and I watched the ripples disturb the starlight for a bit. On the way back to the barracks, I wondered if he enjoyed being so zealously utilitarian. I couldn't know for sure.

I know at the beginning of this story I said there are some good things that happen that keep us going. Well, unfortunately, good things tend to happen as consolations accompanying a plethora of disasters. When I was boarding the air carrier to go to the spaceport, I noticed a group of native children playing in a nearby field. I watched them through my window.

An attendant walked up to me and asked, "Is there anything I can get you, sir?" She asked.

"Who are those children?" I asked. She looked out the window and replied, "Oh, those are some children who were saved when the last of the Freet holdouts surrendered two days ago. The Green Cross is going to have them sent to the academy on Space Station 245e; isn't that something?"

I turned to the window again as we began to taxi, thinking about the bright futures these children would live in the safety of a space station academy. There they would have the ability to closely scrutinize the foolish wars that took place on their home world, and collaborate to make an interstellar community free of the follies their forefathers and governments from other worlds. It may not seem like much, but it was enough to keep me going after everything that happened. Just about at the point when I couldn't see them anymore, I thought I could pick out a boy with gray hair.

STAFF SPOTLIGHT



Photography by S. G. Traylor 2010

Mark van Dyk

Matt Rothrock

HOW MANY NIGHTS? BY MARK VAN DYK

How many nights did I dream you?
From the moon's silver strands
Collected in midnight pools
I spun the wool of your hair.
I drew in the water of a thousand
Dew soaked leaves
And pouring them out
Formed your shimmering eyes.
How many nights did I lay awake
As you drew breath and dreamed me?
While the wind blew,
The stars spun in their orbits,
The moon closed and opened her blue eye,
The leaves budded then turned to gold,
And all things moved so that we might be together
And echo the lust and vigor and serenity of the universe
And of being alive.

HERMIT BY MARK VAN DYK

I will be a hermit
Living beneath the remnants
Of a stone cottage
Between two hills
Where a road
Slick with rain
Runs directly to
My broken hearth,
My blackened chimney,
My moss-covered mantle.
And you...
You will be
My fire.



Photography by S.G. Traylor

NORTHERN APPROACH BY MATT ROTHROCK

Blasting off from mid-continent
A turbulent flight from St. Louis
To San Francisco... a clearly bumpy day
Up above, in that crystalline firmament.
I read about recovery and I read
The news and some sublime Updike short stories,
Where the mundane, profane, arcane lives
Of individuals soar right along with
Our giant silver American Luxury Liner.

Wing rivets shone in the waning March sunlight,
A brilliant sunset to behold, a distraction
From “Dreamgirls” screaming out of the armrests...
As our descent begins, I close the book and watch—
Looking for signs of the usual SFO approach:
The Caldecott Tunnel, the Alameda shipyards to the right,
The water below, the San Mateo Bridge in the foreground...
That long, constant concrete guide, standing firm.

This time, I see something much different...
Wine country—Napa and Sonoma counties,
The Alexander Valley, the Russian River...
Row upon row of grapevines... It’s the northern approach.
Vineyards ascending
Up the sides of foothills and plunging down
Into creeks and tributaries.
I experience Viticultural hallucinations—
Mondavi himself stalking the land,
Smelling earth and air, looking for
The right mineral content to compliment his dark
Berry and black currant and dry oakiness, watching where the
Fog would rest on the hills, demarcating where
This varietal would grow and where that one would not...
Dreaming of empire one green glass bottle at a time.

Dreaming of the Gallo brothers,
Their decidedly American story of success,
As if it were written, scripted, conducted in the land...
Having visions of them grabbing handfuls of sandy
Sonoma soil, letting it run through their fingers and
Drift away in soft coastal winds, converting virtually
Uninhabitable land and arid soil into an oenological Mecca.

These were my hallucinations as we left Wine Country behind,
as we bid Sausalito and Foster City good evening...
There was the Bay and the Great Golden Gate, Alcatraz,
Yerba Buena, TI, but seen differently—
Gleaming in western sunset splendor, the prison water tower
Capped in phosphorescent copper.
Great structures bathed in amber glow...
If Updike were here, I thought, what would he write?
He would write about the physical land for sure, but also about
A young, unlikely couple occupying 26A and B.
He, strapping, tanned, blue-eyed, towheaded from the Midwest,
She, slight, almost waif-like, raised in Haight-Ashbury
By parents who survived “Slouching Towards Bethlehem.”
Anxiety written all over their faces since this would be the first time
He met her parents—
They met at the University of Iowa...
The Writers’ Workshop. His parents, of a strong Republican
Tradition, not missing a Caucus since 1976, represented all
That her parents despised, but love is like that.
In him was everything she wasn’t, in her was everything he wasn’t.

As the gear came down, and as a Delta heavy
Did a parallel descent over the water, a thought drifts
Into the Iowa son’s mind and stays there while
We all dazedly stumble towards the Baggage Claim...

Knowing full well that the meal that night will be vegetarian...
Hummus and pitas, baba ghanoush, falafel, raw vegetables...
Carrot cake for dessert, our Iowa friend,
Wanting to offer an olive branch, maybe because
He has seen her naked, maybe because of Nixon,
Or a little of both,
Must now decide...
Pinot Noir, Syrah, Zinfandel... Oregon, Washington State,
Napa, Sonoma, Paso Robles, Monterey County...

Making his purchase on the way downtown,
He gets back into the sterile rental car.

A cold sweat overtakes him when he sees in his rearview mirror
The disapproving looks of Mondavi, Gallo and Gallo...
He looks to his right, to the waif-hippie-love child,
And wonders if it's really worth the trouble.
Wonders why it happens so awkwardly sometimes...
Wonders what will happen tonight as he presents
Two bottles to these two people so unlike him...
A grassy-grapefruit-cat urine Sauvignon Blanc to the mother,
An organically cultivated rich Zinfandel to the father.

In his possession, a vintage 2007 conciliatory gesture—

He throws the car into gear,
Following the red corpuscular brake lights,
Blending beautifully with crepuscular sights...
US 101 at dusk.

BIOGRAPHIES

SARAH AKEMON

Sarah is a junior studying English Literature. She likes Victoriana, loud music, and having adventures. She has transferred from IUPUC in 2011 to complete her education elsewhere, but continues to actively create poetry.

AMY BALLENGER

Amy is 23 years old and is the first in her family to go to college. She has been writing since before she entered preschool when her grandfather taught her to type on a computer. During high school, she wrote book reviews for the North High School Publications Department, and fan-fiction stories for fanfiction.net. Now Amy is writing poetry and attempting to write a book for future publication.

COLE BILLMAN

Cole studies English Literature at IUPUC and is one of the editors of *Talking Leaves*. He works in the Academic Resource Center as a writing tutor and has been heavily involved in both the English Club and Gay-Straight Alliance on campus.

ALEX CONRAD

Alex was born and raised in the suburban sleepy-ness of Columbus, Indiana. He lives seeking good food, good wine, and good company. He loves his little brother and all of his unrealized children. He writes only for himself, but hopes others will like his work as well.

MARK VAN DYK - STAFF

Mark does research work for the education department at IUPUC. He graduated from the University of Montana in 1995 with a BA in art. Later, he received his teaching license from IUPUC. His fondness for poetry, like so many others, began with Walt Whitman. He has always worked at writing and has recently finished writing his first novel. For him, poetry is about pointing with his hands tied behind my back at what cannot be seen anyway.

RAININ HASH

Rainan Hash is an English Literature major at IUPUC, set to graduate in 2012 with a Bachelor's degree. Her intentions are to use this degree to teach Composition and Creative Writing classes on the college level, as well as the aspiration to teach Literary Interpretation or Introduction to Fiction. At home, she writes science fiction and fantasy stories as well as fan-fiction for Star Trek. Eventually she hopes to publish one of her novels, one of which has been considered by TOR Fiction in New York.

OSHU HUDDLESTON

Oshu graduated in 2011 with his Bachelor's Degree in Creative Writing. His ultimate goal is to publish a collection of his short stories. "It would be nice to teach composition in some form, as well as writing and editing for the entertainment industry in some capacity."

BETH MCQUEEN

Beth McQueen is currently a student at IUPUC majoring in English with a concentration in Creative Writing. She enjoys reading, writing, camping, hiking, nature, music, warm weather, and shopping. She has previously been published in *Talking Leaves* in the 2010 edition. She hopes to one day publish a collection of her poetry.

SUZY MILHOAN

Suzy Milhoan is currently a student at IUPUC majoring in English with a concentration in Creative Writing. An IT professional for 25 years, she is now on her journey into the world of writing. She loves time with family and friends, golf, tennis, reading, writing and listening to live rock bands. She is working on her first book, *The Healing Game*, which is to be published in 2012 by Abbott Press.

CARLEIGH OWENS

Carleigh Owens was born in Toronto, Canada in 1989. She and her family moved to the states in 1990 where she now resides. She is a student at Indiana University, Purdue University Columbus and is a member of the IUPUI National Honor Society. Carleigh is writer of poetry and short stories. Her inspiration comes strictly from the struggles she witnesses in life.

TAMRA ROE

Tamra Roe is a freshman at IUPUC and is pursuing a B.A. in Psychology. She also recently applied for online classes from Liberty University and is hoping to get an associate degree in Christian counseling from Liberty.

TERESA RAY

Teresa Ray is an English major at IUPUC seeking a degree with a focus on creative writing. She plans to one day become a published author.

CYNTHIA SCOTT

Cynthia Scott is a non-traditional student completing her Bachelor of General Studies degree with a concentration in Arts and Humanities. She is also fulfilling a minor in Writing and Literacy. In addition to her interest in writing, Cynthia has a hobby related to stamp collecting: she creates computer art for printing on envelopes called First Day Covers.

MATT ROTHROCK- STAFF

Matthew Rothrock has been writing poetry since 2007 and has been published as a student in previous editions of *Talking Leaves*. He has also been senior editor and editor-at-large of previous editions. He's a 2008 graduate of IUPUC, receiving a degree with high distinction in English Language and Literature. He currently is the IUPUC Facilitator in the Academic Resource Center. In addition to writing poetry, Matthew performs it regularly, and has shared the same stage with the likes of Matthew D. Jackson and Buddy Wakefield.

CHRIS SIMS

Chris is current student at IUPUC focusing on a major in Creative Writing. He writes for the Hope Star Journal, and continues to write science fiction short stories. In addition to his writing talents, he has interests in graphic illustration of comic books.

NATHAN SMITH

Nathan Smith is 26 and a Psychology major at IUPUC. He is married and has four furry and four legged babies. He has been writing poetry since 1999, and in 2007 published his first book through Art in the Heartland. He enjoys sharing open-mic poetry but his main passion is music. Playing drums since age 13, he is now adapting to playing with one foot because of a right foot amputation in 2010. He loves Psychology and aspires to become an addictions counselor to help those who are struggling with life's hurts, hang ups, and habits.

TYLER WHITE

Tyler is a student at IUPUC. "Ultimately, my life's ambition is to be a student, teacher, observer, writer, musician, poet, preacher, pilgrim, pirate, shipwrecked, kidnapped, and come home at the end of the day with a story to tell."

SHERRY TRAYLOR

Sherry G. Traylor a senior at IUPUC, studying English Literature. She lives in Columbus and has one daughter who attends Purdue University. She spent 22 years in nursing before changing careers. She has authored three books, enjoys photography, and continues writing daily. This is her first year editing *Talking Leaves*, and she has been a writing tutor for IUPUC for three years.

